

ANGELA

A SKETCH IN

INDIAN INK



B. M. CROKER

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A N G E L

"A woman is a foreign land
Of which, though there he settle young,
A man will ne'er quite understand
The customs, politics, and tongue."

THE ANGEL IN THE HOUSE.

ANGEL

A SKETCH IN
INDIAN
INK



By *Beatrice* B. M. CROKER

*Author of "Beyond the Pale,"
"Infatuation," etc.*

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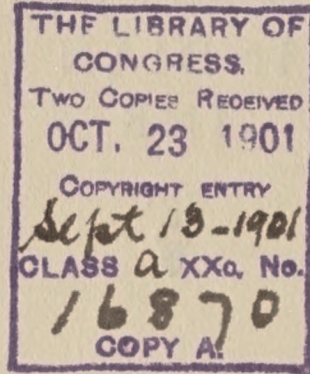
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ANGEL

CHAPTER I

"PATIENCE ON A GATE"

IT was the middle of March in the North-West Provinces, and the hot weather had despatched several heralds to Ramghur, announcing its imminent approach. Punkahs were swinging lazily in barrack rooms, the annual ice notice had made a round of the station, many families had quitted the sweltering cantonments for the misty Himalayas, and the brain fever bird had arrived! Moreover, the red-capped tennis boys were on half-pay, the polo ground was abandoned, the club reading-room had cancelled all the ladies' papers, and its long dim verandah presented a melancholy vista of empty chairs.

Outside in the gardens, and all over the district, cork trees, acacias, and stately teak upheld their naked branches, as if in agonised appeal to a pitiless blue sky, whilst their leaves, crisp and shrivelled, choked the neighbouring nullahs, or were chased up and down the dusty plains and roads by a howling hot wind.

At a corner where two of these roads met, and about a mile from the club, stood a large irregular bungalow, with a thatched roof and walls of a vivid

pink complexion, as if it were blushing—as well it might—for its straggling and neglected compound. The gate of this was closed, and through its wooden bars a white-faced shabby little girl was gazing intently. Otherwise the premises appeared to be deserted; the servants were presumably smoking and gossiping in the bazaar, the stables were empty, the very dogs were out. No, there was not a living creature to be seen, except a couple of quarrelsome crows and this solitary child. Although Angel Gascoigne had elevated herself by standing on the second rung of the gate, she was unable to lean comfortably on the top bar, but peered below like some caged creature, for she was remarkably small for her age. Indeed, if any of her acquaintance had been suddenly called upon to name it, they would have answered, “Oh—Angel! She is about six.” Nevertheless, it was nine years, and long, long years to Angel, since she had come into the world in a damp little bungalow in distant Dalhousie.

She wore a limp cotton frock, a pinafore to correspond, black stockings, much darned at the knees, and shapeless sand shoes ludicrously large for her fairy feet. Her arms and head were bare, the latter covered with a mane of sun-bleached locks; her face was small, pinched, and prematurely wise, but the features were delicate, and the whole countenance was illuminated by a pair of painfully wistful blue eyes. The child’s pose was touching. She looked exactly what she was—forlorn, desolate, and neglected. For a whole hour she remained motionless at her post, and while she watched and waited, various vehicles had passed; among these, a large

landau containing two languid women propped up with cushions and waving date leaf fans. They smiled and nodded affably to Angel, and as they rolled slowly by, young Mrs. Gordon said to the lady who was taking her for an airing:

“There is that poor child of Mrs. Wilkinson’s. What a weird little face! It is positively disgraceful the way she is overlooked and left to servants.”

“Yes,” agreed her companion. “The result of her mother’s second marriage. Colonel Wilkinson is wrapped up in his bank-book and his boys. Mrs. Wilkinson is wrapped up in her clothes. I do believe that woman’s heart is composed of a reel of cotton, and unfortunate Cinderella is left in the kitchen—there is no fairy godmother for *her*. She ought to have been sent home years ago,” continued Mrs. Jones, with the authority of one who is dealing with her friend’s expenditure.

“There is no doubt of that,” assented Mrs. Gordon, a very pretty Irish girl who had recently come to India as the wife of a civilian. “Some one told me the other day that Angel is twelve years of age.”

“Oh, dear no,” replied Mrs. Jones, with a touch of irritation, “I remember when she was born. I remember her mother when she came up to Simla, such a lovely girl, and that is not more than ten years ago. She had a host of admirers, and of course she took the least desirable; handsome, penniless, reckless Tony Gascoigne. They could not have done worse, either of them, if they had tried.”

“And now since he is dead, and his widow has married again, it seems to me that it is poor little Gascoigne who suffers for that foolish match,” de-

clared the other lady. "The child should be at school—if only the money was forthcoming."

"But with Colonel Wilkinson's economies, and Lena Wilkinson's extravagances, there is not much prospect of *that*," rejoined Mrs. Jones, and the subject dropped.

The landau was succeeded by a smart victoria, in which was seated a stiff-backed lady in a dainty muslin gown. This was Mrs. Dawson, the Judge's wife, who vouchsafed no notice of Angel beyond a glance of stern disapproval. Next came an ekka packed with chattering native women, who laughed and made merry signals to the little figure on the gate, but the child took no notice of their blandishments, her face still retained its expression of rigid expectation. At last she stirred, there was a faint sound of muffled hoofs in the sandy lane which bordered the compound wall, and in another moment two men on horseback came into sight. These were comrades, who chummed together in a dilapidated bungalow at the back of Colonel Wilkinson's abode. The slight dark man, riding a few paces in advance, was Philip Gascoigne, a Royal Engineer, reputed to be the owner of the hardest head and the softest heart in the station. His companion, following on a flea-bitten grey, was Wilfred Shafto, subaltern in a crack regiment of native cavalry, a loose-jointed, long-legged youth, whose curly locks, gay blue eyes, and admirable profile, went far to justify his nickname of "Beauty Shafto." Besides his good looks, Shafto was endowed with an exuberant vitality and a stock of animal spirits, that even the hot weather failed to subdue. Both he and his chum were popular in the

cantonment, being keen soldiers, cheery comrades, and, above all, good fellows; but Shafto only was a universal favourite, for he was a ladies' man. Yet, strange to say, it was not Shafto but Gascoigne who reined up in order to speak to the little girl at the gate. *He* merely gazed, grinned, and jeered, saying, “Hullo, a case of confined to barracks, young 'un!—in disgrace again, eh? I say, there's a five-act tragedy in that face, Phil. Don't be late for rack-ets,” and shaking up his old Arab, he heartlessly cantered away.

“Well, Angel, what's the meaning of this?” inquired Gascoigne, leaning over his pony's neck. “Not in trouble, I hope?”

The child raised her great eyes to his, and slowly shook her head.

“Then what is the matter?” he repeated. “What have you been doing now?”

“*I've* not been doing anything,” she protested in a clear but woeful treble. “Mother and Colonel Wilkinson have gone to Dolly Tollemache's birthday party, and taken all the children—but—I had”—here two crystal tears escaped from her long lashes—“no hat.”

“Poor little soul!” exclaimed Gascoigne, “that was bad luck. What happened to your hat?”

“Beany threw it in the tank, and oh—I wanted to go so much.” Her voice rose to a pitiful wail as she added, “Dolly is *my* friend—and there was a bran pie.”

“And I am your friend as well as Dolly, am I not?” he urged.

“Oh, yes,” and she gazed up at him with swim-

ming eyes. "Of course—you are my cousin Philip—but you don't live with me, and I am so miserable," she faltered. "The servants push me about, and the children pinch me, and Colonel Wilkinson calls me a liar and—a little devil."

Here she broke down and, resting her head on her skinny arms, sobbed hysterically.

"He did not mean it, Angel," protested her cousin. "I am sure Colonel Wilkinson was not in earnest; he is a kind-hearted man, and looks the soul of good humour."

"*Looks!*" she flashed out furiously. "Yes, and he is good-humoured with the children, but you should see him when the bearer brings his account, or when a shop bill comes in. I wish you saw his looks then! And he hates me. Only this morning he said I was a viper on his hearth and a curse. Oh," with another outburst, "I wish I was dead—like my own father."

Gascoigne dismounted hastily and putting his hand upon her shoulder, said, "Come, Angel, this is very bad. You are a silly child, and imagine things—it's all the hot weather, and you are feeling a bit slack and out of sorts. You will soon be up in the hills, gathering pine cones and orchids."

"No, indeed I shan't," she rejoined, as she raised her head and confronted him with an expression of despair on her small tear-stained face. "Mother says she can't afford it this year. She is going to send baby to Mrs. Browne, but we must all stay down. Oh, how I hate Ramghur," and her eyes roved over their brick-coloured, dusty surroundings, "I wish I was dead."

“My poor Angel! this is melancholy news. Why should you cut yourself off at the age of nine? I hope you have a long and merry life before you.”

“Why should I live?” she demanded fiercely, “no one wants *me*.”

“Don’t you think your mother wants you?”

“No,” she answered breathlessly in gasps, “she has the children—she would never miss me. They went off in the bullock bandy, so dressed up and noisy, Pinky in mother’s own blue sash, all going to enjoy themselves, and not one of them even looked back. The servants are at a funeral, and I’ve been alone the whole evening.”

This pitiful tale was illustrated by a pathetic little face streaming with tears.

“Now then, listen to me, Angel,” said the young man, impressively, “I believe you’ve been running about in the sun, and have got a touch of fever, and besides, you take things too much to heart.”

“No I don’t,” she answered passionately, “everyone says I have no heart—and no one cares for me.”

“That’s bosh,” he protested, “your mother cares—and so do I.” Here he stooped, and dried her tears with his own handkerchief.

“Do you really, cousin Phil?” suddenly seizing his hand with her hot nervous fingers. “Really—not make-believe?”

“I never make-believe—really.”

“Then—I am—glad,” and now the elf clasped his arm, and looked up at him fixedly, “for I *do* love you, as much as mother, yes, and more than the whole big world.”

“That’s a large order, my child,” stroking her

cheek. "You have not seen the world yet—you won't repeat that in ten years' time. And now I must be off, or I shall be late. Look here," speaking from the saddle, "I'll come over to-morrow, and ask your mother if I may take you for a drive. How will that be, eh?"

"Not," clapping her hands ecstatically, "with Sally Lunn!"

"Why not with Sally, and for a good ten mile spin into the country beyond the railway?"

"Oh, how splendid. And it's moonlight, too. I shan't sleep one wink for thinking of to-morrow."

"In that case I warn you, I shall leave you behind," he announced as he gathered up his reins. "Cheer up, Angel, and don't let me hear any more about dying. Good-bye," and wheeling his impatient pony, he turned her head towards the maidan, and galloped away over the flat parade ground which lay between the bungalow and the club, raising as he went a cloud of red dust.

Angel stood motionless staring after him, till a huge peepul tree hid him from her gaze. "A drive in his beautiful dogcart," she said to herself, "with its dark blue cushions and red wheels, and crazy Sally, the fastest trotter in Ramghur. Phil never took grown-up ladies for a drive—yet she was invited—she hoped he would go right through the bazaar so that everyone might see them! The Wallace children and that sneering Dodd boy. How delicious! But what was she to do for a hat?" As she stood pondering this momentous question, with an old, care-worn expression on her child's face, a fat ayah

suddenly appeared near the bungalow and shrieked out in Hindustani:

“Missy Angel—what you doing there? Come away from the road, oh shameless one! Wicked child, without hat or topee. Supper is ready, come therefore at once. Think of what the Colonel Sahib will say if he sees thee thus.”

This shrill invocation was all delivered in one breath. When it had concluded, the child turned about, slipped off the gate, and with unexpected alacrity ran up the drive, and was presently swallowed by the shadows of a long verandah.

CHAPTER II

IN THE VERANDAH

BEFORE the station clock had chimed six the following morning, every soul in the Wilkinsons' bungalow was astir. The portly head of the house, clad in lily-white drill, and mounted on a lily-white charger, had ambled off at daybreak, to preside over the cantonment rations. In the long west verandah, the bamboo blinds were already down in order to keep out the blinding glare, and behind these "chicks" the entire family was assembled. Three podgy, pasty-faced children were solemnly playing at bazaar, and buying, selling, and chaffering, in ludicrous but unconscious imitation of their elders. The fourth was a mere spectator in the arms of the fat ayah who with her understudy kept order among the infants. Occasionally a shrill exclamation, a whimper, or a howl, arose from their corner, but taking them *en masse*, Beany, Pinky Tod, and Baba were unemotional and well-behaved infants. They ate well, slept well, and conducted themselves sedately. Nevertheless, it must be confessed that they were not fair to see, but then we all know that it is better to be good than beautiful. A painful illustration of this axiom was beside them, in the shape of their half-sister Angel, who with puckered brows and compressed lips, was labouring away at a hand-

sewing machine, and turning out yards of faultlessly hemmed frills. She was pretty, all the ladies said so—indeed, she said so herself—but even the dog boy was aware that Missy Angel was not good, did not want to be good, and made no secret of the terrible fact. Angel assured her brothers that it was a thousand times nicer to be wicked. She would not eat cold curry, she refused to go to bed at seven o'clock, she laughed at her kind papa, and sang when the ayahs scolded her.

Not far from Angel squatted the dirzee, a thin, grave-eyed man in spotless white clothes and turban. He was holding a piece of muslin between two of his toes, and cutting down a neatly marked crease with a pair of gigantic scissors. This was Kadir Bux, a capable workman, and Mrs. Wilkinson's much coveted treasure. Nor was Mrs. Wilkinson herself idle, although she reclined on a long cane lounge, propped up with cushions. She was intently occupied in trimming a smart evening bodice. One glance proved sufficient, to assure us that the lady was clever with her fingers, for she turned and twisted the lace with the audacious familiarity of a practised hand. It is said, that could they but discover it, everyone is endowed with a special gift; there are thousands of mortals who go through life unconscious of their own capacities, but Mrs. Wilkinson was one of those more fortunate beings who had found her metier, and gloried in its exercise. She was an accomplished milliner and a really first-class dressmaker. In all the province there was not a woman who could put in a sleeve, tie a bow, or hang a skirt as well as Angel's mamma. Once upon

a time—and that time not very distant—Mrs. Wilkinson had been a beauty, but continuous hot seasons on the plains, harassing money cares, and indifferent health had combined to filch her of her good looks. There were hard lines about her mouth, her cheeks had fallen in, and her complexion—only appeared in the evening. Of course, in early morning *deshabille* we do not expect to see a lady at her best. Still, her carelessly arranged hair was abundant, her features were delicate, and her blue eyes had not yet lost the power of their spell. Black-lashed, plaintive blue eyes, what had they not achieved for their owner? How much she owes to them. What difficulties surmounted, what favours granted—what friends! They resembled in potency some fabled talisman; their mistress had but to wish, look, and possess. Fortunately, Mrs. Wilkinson's ambition was of a moderate character. She merely desired to be the best-dressed woman in her circle, that is to say station, and hitherto her pre-eminence had been supreme.

"The Mrs. Wilkinson who dresses so well," enjoyed a fame that went beyond the bounds of her own province, and had even been echoed in much maligned Madras.

Just at present this celebrity, her eldest born, and her faithful dirzee were labouring hard in order to maintain this far-reaching reputation. The scene in which they slaved was no bad imitation of the work-room of some smart dressmaker. Chairs were piled with materials, the matting was littered with scraps of lace, muslin, and calico; patterns and fashion-plates lay scattered around, and in the foreground

was a wicker dress-stand, surmounted by an exact model of Mrs. Wilkinson's own graceful figure—a costly but indispensable possession. At this moment it was attired in an elaborate white ball skirt and low satin bodice, and at a little distance appeared to be one of the party in the verandah.

To slave for days, nay weeks, at her sewing machine, to cut up, contrive and piece, scanty materials; to ponder for hours over patterns, confer with an unimaginative native, cope with failures, and plunge into debt, were a few of the drawbacks to Mrs. Wilkinson's pre-eminence. But inconvenience, anxiety, and self-denial were forgotten when she appeared in an incomparable "success," conscious of triumph, aware that she was the cynosure of all eyes, and that even in church she absorbed the attention of half the congregation. It is true that certain rivals, women with ungrudging husbands, replenished their wardrobes from London and Paris. Nevertheless, with even these, this talented artiste was able to compete, for she was endowed with the gift of wearing, as well as of designing, her matchless toilettes. Her figure was slender and graceful, and in a smart evening gown, with just the least little touch on her cheeks, Mrs. Wilkinson still held her own in a ball-room; her dancing was perfection, and, next to dress, her sole passion.

As for the lady's past, despite her craze for dress and dancing, it was extraordinarily monotonous, and uneventful.

* * * * *

Miss Lena Shardlow, a charming but penniless orphan, had arrived at Simla, some years before this

story opens, on a cold weather visit to distant relations, who invited her out, in the benevolent hope that Lena's pretty face would prove her fortune. If, as they afterwards declared, she had played her cards properly, Lena might have married a member of Council; it was true that he had already seen the grave close over two wives, also that he was neither young nor comely, but he could offer Lena a splendid position as his wife, and a fine pension as his widow. The girl had many admirers—indeed, she was the success of the season. Among these admirers was Tony Gascoigne, a feather-brained junior subaltern in the Silver Hussars. Tony was handsome and well connected, but reckless and impecunious. In an evil moment a brother officer had advised him “not to make a fool of himself with the little Shardlow girl,” and the warning proved immediately fatal. He married her within six weeks—her friends were not present at the ceremony—and brought his lovely bride down to Umballa in insuppressed triumph. Sad to relate, this triumph proved but short-lived—it was cruelly slain in the regimental orderly room, and died by the hand of Tony's commanding officer. Colonel St. Oriel had a strong prejudice against married subalterns, and a married subaltern of a year's standing was only surpassed by the notorious miscreant who had actually joined his regiment with a wife and a perambulator.

It was whispered in the mess, that when “the old man” received cards and cake, he had actually gnashed his teeth. At any rate, the proud bridegroom was sent on detachment within twenty-four hours. A year later, when Tony and his wife were on leave in

the hills, one wet black night, his pony lost his hind legs over the brink of a slippery khud, and Tony's book of life was closed at page twenty-three. He left a widow and a puny infant in a cheap bungalow, not a hundred yards from the scene of the tragedy. He also left many debts. At first poor Mrs. Gascoigne was stunned, then inconsolable, although her kind neighbours came forward to her assistance in a fashion peculiar to India. For weeks she remained in cloister-like seclusion, waiting for the monsoon to abate, before returning to England, where it would be her fate to live on distant relations and a pension of thirty pounds a year. Ere three months had elapsed, it was noticed that Major Wilkinson, of the Commissariat, despatched baskets of tempting fruit and rare flowers to a certain retired bungalow. These, as days went by, he boldly followed in person, and long before the year was out, an engagement was announced, and all the world of Dalhousie declared, that little Mrs. Gascoigne had done remarkably well for herself and her child. Major Wilkinson was neither young nor dashing, he had also the reputation of being "careful with his money." On the other hand, he was a sensible man, with savings in the Bank of Bengal, and a small property in New Zealand. The middle-aged Major was unmistakably in love with the pretty blue-eyed widow, but, to impart a secret, he had never exhibited the smallest enthusiasm for her offspring, and now that he had four sturdy olive branches of his own, indifference had developed into unconcealed aversion. Perhaps (for he was a model parent) he may have been a little jealous of his step-daughter's airy grace and

high-bred features. Angel was an aristocrat to the tips of her shocking sand-shoes, whilst his own beloved progeny were undeniably *bourgeois*—stumpy, stolid, heavy children, whose faces recalled the colour and contour of a cream cheese. Although Colonel Wilkinson scaled sixteen stone, he was an active, bustling man—indeed some people considered him “fussy”—an excellent organiser and administrator in his official capacity, whilst at home in the domestic circle he saw to everything himself, thus relieving his Lena of all housekeeping cares. He checked the bazaar accounts, gave out the stores, oil and fodder, ordered the meals and hectored the servants—he even instructed the ayah, and harried the milkman—the only person over whom he had no control was the dirzee. Consequently Lena had nothing to do but compose costumes, amuse herself, and look pretty. In her heart of hearts, Angel, her first-born, was her mother’s favourite child, but no whisper of this weakness ever escaped her lips. She was too painfully aware, that Richard was excessively jealous of the claims of his family, whom he idolised.

Of course Angel ought to have been sent home, no one was more alive to this duty than her parent, but unhappily Mrs. Wilkinson had no private income; she was compelled to ask for every rupee she expended, and it was with difficulty she obtained a slender sum for the children’s clothes. As for her own toilettes, her husband liked to see her in pretty gowns, he was proud of them, and of her, but when it came to paying—oh! that was another affair altogether. Every bill she presented to him entailed a

battle—or at least an argument, and what of those bills, those frightful bills, she dared not let him see?

If Colonel Wilkinson growled savagely when called upon to disburse for Angel's meagre wardrobe, how could her mother hope for a substantial cheque to defray her outfit, passage, and education? Much as Colonel Wilkinson disliked the child, he had not the heart to open his purse strings and provide for her removal to another home and hemisphere.

Angel was naturally intelligent, and had picked up the art of reading and writing, without perceptible labour. The occasional lessons of an Eurasian schoolmistress had introduced her to the multiplication table, and the outlines of history and geography. She spoke Hindustani with the facility and correctness of an Indian-born child. She could sing the "Tazza Ba Tazza," and dance like a nautch girl, and the servants alternately bullied and feared her. They were all somewhat distrustful of "Missy Angel." She knew too much—she was too wise.

As Angel sat on the floor of the verandah, her sharp white face bent intently on the needle, her thin arm tirelessly turning the handle of the sewing machine, her thoughts were not with her task. She was wondering why the ayah's sister happened to wear a jacket of similar stuff to the piece which was sliding through her hands? Stolen of course—how, and when? Oh, what a pig Anima was; and it was late, and Philip had not come. Had he forgotten his promise, he who never forgot a promise? She rose stealthily, and went to a "chick," pulled it a little

aside and peered out. Nothing to be seen but the brick-coloured compound, the sandy drive, the cork trees, a quiver in the heated air.

"Missy Angel, what you doing?" screamed the ayah, "what you looking for? Go back and sit down."

Angel returned to her post with noiseless steps, but as she resumed her task, she held up the muslin towards the ayah, and said:

"You see this, Anima? Some is stolen. I was only looking for the thief. Do *you* know her?"

CHAPTER III

AN EARLY VISIT

ANIMA ayah pounced upon the gage thus recklessly flung at her, and was proceeding to pour out the seven vials of her wrath in a lava-like stream, when, luckily for her challenger, the sound of hoofs outside, a spurred heel on the steps, created a diversion. Then a man's voice called up, "Hullo, Lena, are you at home?"

Instantly the dirzee seized the half-clad figure in his arms, and eloped with it indoors, whilst Angel sprang to the blind, dragged it back, and ushered in Philip Gascoigne.

"Well, little one," he said, taking her limp hand in his, "How are you to-day? Lena, please don't move." For Mrs. Wilkinson had struggled up, and now sat erect on her long cane lounge, vainly endeavouring to make the end of her old tea gown cover the toes of her shabby slippers.

"I'm only going to stay five minutes," continued her visitor, seating himself astride a chair. "How did you enjoy the children's party?"

"Not much," she answered with a laugh.

"And Angel—not at all, eh?"

"Angel!" cried Mrs. Wilkinson, suddenly raising her voice, "do stop that horrible machine, and run away and learn your lessons."

Angel paused in her labours, drew her beautifully marked eyebrows together, and looked curiously at her mother. Then she rose, handed her frill to the dirzee, and obediently withdrew, vanishing through one of the many doors into the interior of the bungalow—but not to learn her lessons. Oh no, she went straight to Mrs. Wilkinson's bedroom, hunted about for a certain library book, and settled herself comfortably on a sofa. There, stretched at full length, with a couple of cushions carefully arranged at her back, she resembled a small edition of her mother! Presently she opened the novel, found her place, and began to read. The name of the novel was "Moths."

In the meanwhile conversation in the verandah was proceeding; as soon as her daughter had disappeared, Mrs. Wilkinson resumed:

"I left Angel at home as a punishment; it's only the punishment she feels."

"She feels a good many things," rejoined Gascoigne. "What has she been up to now?"

"Oh, never mind," retorted the lady, with a touch of irritation. "You think Angel is an angel."

"Excuse me, I do not; but she is only a child—we were children ourselves. Why are you all so rough on her?"

"I'm sure I'm not rough on her," protested Mrs. Wilkinson in a highly injured key, "but she is always rubbing Richard up the wrong way—he is so sensitive, too, and only the other day she called him a 'mud cart officer.' Really, I can't imagine where she picks up her awful expressions."

"She picks up everything, I fancy—chaff and corn," remarked her cousin.

"At any rate, Richard simply detests her," continued Mrs. Wilkinson. "I keep her out of his way as much as possible, as he hates the very sight of her. He says you never know what she is going to do next; she plays the most unexpected tricks, she is heartless, untruthful, and fond of luxury."

Gascoigne broke into a short, incredulous laugh. "What! that thin, shabby little child. My dear Lena, she does not know what the word luxury means."

Her mother heaved a profound sigh as she answered, "Remember, I do not say these horrid things. I know that Angel is not heartless; she has strong feelings, she is devoted to me—and she simply worships *you*."

"Oh, bosh!" he exclaimed, with a gesture of protest.

"But it is true, I assure you, that in Angel's eyes you are something between a Fairy Prince and a Holy Saint, and quite perfect. She actually threw a milk jug at Pinky, because he said you were ugly."

Gascoigne laughed a hearty laugh, displaying his nice white teeth. He could well afford to despise Pinky's opinion, for, although no rival to Beauty Shafto, Gascoigne was a good-looking fellow, and made a conspicuous and agreeable figure in that somewhat squalid verandah, with his trim uniform and well-groomed air. His forehead and jaw were square, his eyes dark, cool, and penetrating; the whole expression indicated keen intelligence and absolute self-control.

Altogether it was an interesting face. A face that had left its impress on most people's memories.

"Threw the milk jug," he repeated; "that was scarcely the retort courteous; but I'm glad to see she made a bad shot," and he glanced at Pinky's round and stolid countenance. "What's all this finery for?" he continued, timidly touching the satin in her lap.

"To make me beautiful," she answered. "Men's garments are so hideous that women have to do double duty. I am going to wear this at the Giffards' cotillion to-morrow night."

"A dance, this weather. What lunacy!"

"It may seem so to you, who never enter a ball-room, but I must do something to keep myself going, and it's cool enough as yet, after eleven o'clock. Half-a-dozen waltzes are a better tonic for me than any amount of quinine."

"Long may you live to say so," he exclaimed, "but waltzing with the thermometer at 100, I should call the dance of death. Mind you don't overdo it, Lena mia," and he looked at her narrowly.

Lena Wilkinson was a delicate woman, thin and worn, with an insatiable appetite for excitement and amusement. Her social triumphs and secret labours drew heavily on the bank of a frail constitution, and no one but herself ever guessed how often she trembled on the verge of a serious breakdown.

"I say," resumed Gascoigne, "I came to ask if I may take Angel for a drive this evening? You have no objection, have you?" he added, as Mrs. Wilkinson's expression conveyed blank amazement. "At any rate, it will clear her out of Wilkinson's path for a couple of hours," he concluded persuasively.

"But she will think so much of it, and be so flattered and cock-a-hoop," protested her mother.

"Lena," and his eyes sparkled angrily, "do you grudge the poor kid even this little pleasure?"

"No, I don't," hastily relenting, "and I'm horrid. I was thinking that you never took *me* out."

"I shall be only too honoured. You have but to name your own time. I thought you hated a two-wheeled trap, or I'd have offered long ago."

"It's quite true, I do loathe high dog carts and pulling trotters. I've no courage now, and that Sally of yours goes like an express train. Ten years ago, how I should have loved it! What a curse it is to have nerves!"

"I expect you want a change to the hills. Angel tells me you are not going to stir this hot weather. Mind you, Lena, it is a mistake."

"Oh, I know; but Richard declares that he cannot possibly afford two establishments, and he must stay down. Angel looks bleached. Three hot seasons are enough to take the colour out of anyone, and are trying to a child. That is what makes her so cross, and dainty, and discontented."

"You ought to go away, Lena, if only for two months. You look run down yourself."

"Yes, and I feel run down, too. Here she paused, took up her work for a moment, and put in two or three stitches. "I sometimes wonder——" she began, and said no more.

"What do you sometimes wonder?" he inquired.

"It is only when I lie awake at night, listening to the jackals—they always make me feel so des-

perately depressed, and when I am quite in the blues I cannot help asking myself what would become of Angel if—anything happened to me?”

“What a dismal idea, an odious little blue devil!” he exclaimed. “You should light a lamp and read some cheery novel; that would soon chase him away.”

“And I might fall asleep, and set the bungalow on fire.”

“Look here, Lena,” he resumed, hitching his chair a little closer, “you know I’m pretty well off; no debts, no wife.”

“Fancy naming them in the same breath!” she protested with a laugh.

“Well, sometimes one brings the other,” and he nodded his head gaily; then, lowering his voice, he continued, “I daresay it is hard for Wilkinson to make both ends meet, with heavy insurances, and all that sort of thing”—Wilkinson was scrupulously saving and investing half of his pay—“so—so——” Then, with a sudden rush, “If you’ll just run up to the hills for three months, and take Angel and the boys—I’ll make it all right—you know I’m your cousin.”

“Yes,” she assented rather bitterly, “and the only Gascoigne who ever deigned to take the smallest notice of me; but it can’t be done, Phil. You are a dear good fellow to suggest it, and if the matter lay with me I’d accept it like a shot and be off to-morrow; but Richard would not hear of it.”

“Well, then, let me send Angel, with an ayah, to some good boarding-house where the lady will look after her. Surely, he would make no objec-

tion to that. She would be out of his sight for months."

"Perhaps not; but he has such odd ideas, and although he does not want her here, I doubt if he would allow her to go elsewhere. There," starting up, "I hear him now. He is coming."

"At any rate, you might sound him, Lena, and I'll call in for Angel at half-past five."

"Hullo, Gascoigne—you here?" and a stout, breathless little man, with prodigious moustache and a shining round face, came puffing up the steps. "I tell you," he panted, "this day is going to be a corker!—my reins were mad hot, and Graham says there are five cases of heat apoplexy in hospital. Lena, we must have the cuscus tatties up at once."

"They say this season is to be something quite extra," remarked Gascoigne, who had risen to his feet.

"Yes, yes," cried Colonel Wilkinson, "the usual bazaar talk. But," mopping his face, "if this is the beginning, where shall we all be in the end of May—eh, Lena?"

"In the cemetery, perhaps," she suggested gravely.

"Come, come, old woman—none of your ghastly jokes. Hullo, Beany boy; well, my Pinkums. Ayah," in a sharper key, "what do you mean by letting Master Beany wear his best shoes?"

"They are all he has got, sahib—others done fall to pieces," she answered sullenly.

"Fall to grandmother! Let *me* see them. And I say, the children are to have plenty of ice in their milk to-day. I've ordered in two seers extra. Has Master Baba had his tonic? Here—you must all

clear out of the verandah—it's like a furnace. Away you go!" and, raising his arms as if driving a flock of geese, he hustled the whole family precipitately indoors, whilst Gascoigne snatched up his whip and fled.

CHAPTER IV.

ANGEL IN EXCELSIS

PUNCTUAL to the moment, Philip Gascoigne arrived to take his little cousin for the promised drive, and Angel's eyes shone like stars when she descried his smart dogcart spinning up the approach. Sally Lunn, or "Mad" Sally, a good-looking bay, stud-bred, in hard condition, enjoyed the reputation of being the fastest trotter, as well as the most hot-tempered and eccentric animal, in the station; only those blessed with a cool head and no nerves were competent to manage her. Here she came, pulling double, and tossing flecks of foam over her bright brass harness.

Mrs. Wilkinson felt a secret thrill of thankfulness that it was not about to be her lot to sit behind this excitable creature, the author of a lengthy chapter of accidents. However, Mrs. Wilkinson's little daughter did not share these fears. She had been dressed and ready for an hour, and now ran quickly down the steps, in a clear starched frock, her hat restored, her hair elaborately crimped, climbed into the cart with the agility of a monkey, and took her place with the dignity of a queen. It is true that her shapely little black legs dangled in a somewhat undignified fashion. Nevertheless she declined a footstool with a gesture of contempt—nor was Sally disposed to linger. In another moment the dogcart swung out

of the gate, and was humming down the road at the rate of eleven miles an hour. Angel, very upright, with her hair streaming behind her, elation in her pose; Gascoigne sitting square and steady, giving his full attention to his impetuous trapper.

"Thank goodness, Philip is a first-rate whip," exclaimed Mrs. Wilkinson, as she turned her eyes from this fleeting vision and rested them on her husband, "otherwise I would never trust the child with that animal."

"Bah, there's no fear," protested Colonel Wilkinson from his long chair, taking up a paper as he spoke. "You may trust *her* with any animal; and Gascoigne knows what he's about—he understands horses; but I'm blessed if I understand him. He must be hard up for company when he calls for that brat."

"She is his cousin, you see," answered her parent, "and—Richard——" a pause; long pauses were a peculiarity of Mrs. Wilkinson's conversation.

"Well?" impatiently. "What?"

"He thinks she looks so white and thin, and he has offered to send her up to the hills for three months—at his own expense. What do you say?"

Colonel Wilkinson reflected for some seconds behind the pages of his "Pioneer." He detested Angel; an arrogant, insolent little ape, whose shrill treble broke into and amended his best stories, who never shed a tear, no matter what befell her at his hands, and who laughed in his face when he stormed. He would be rid of her—but he would also be renouncing his authority. Angel was his step-daughter—Gascoigne was only her father's cousin. Her

keep was nominal, and the station would talk. No—certainly *no*.

“What do I say?” he repeated, emerging with considerable crackling from behind his screen. “I say no, and I call the offer confounded cheek on the part of Gascoigne. What is good enough for my own children is good enough for her. They are not going to budge this season.”

“But the boys are so much younger, Richard, dear,” ventured his wife.

“Well, I won’t have Gascoigne interfering with a member of my family, cousin or no cousin. Some day he will find out what a little devil she is, for all her angel name and angel face,” and with this depressing prophecy Colonel Wilkinson retired once more behind his “Pioneer.”

Meanwhile the “little devil” was in the seventh heaven, as she and her Jehu bowled along the straight flat road, overtaking and passing every other vehicle—a triumph dear to Angel.

“Look here, young ’un, where would you like me to drive you—you shall choose the route,” said Gascoigne suddenly.

“Right in front of the club, then past the railway station and through the bazaar,” was her prompt and unexpected answer.

“Good Lord, what a choice! And why?”

“Just that people may see me,” replied Angel, and she put out her hand and touched his arm, as she added, “See me—driving with *you*.”

“No great sight; but, all the same, you shall have your way—you don’t often get it, do you?”

Angel made no reply beyond a queer little laugh,

and they sped through the cantonments, meeting the remnant who were left taking their dutiful airing. These did not fail to notice the "Wilkinson's Angel," as she was called, seated aloft beside Captain Gascoigne, pride in her port, her little sharp face irradiated with the serene smile of absolute content. The two Miss Brewers, in their rickety pony carriage, envied the child fully as much as she could have desired. Mrs. Dawson stared, bowed, and looked back; so did some men on their way to rackets.

"Well, Gascoigne was a good sort, and it was just the kind of thing he would do—give up his game to take a kid for a spin into the country. Why, he was making straight for the bazaar." The bazaar was narrow and thronged with ekkas, camels, bullock carts, and cattle, as well as crammed with human beings. As Gascoigne steered carefully in and out of the crowd, a bright idea flashed upon him. There was Narwainjees, a large general shop which sold everything from Paris hats to pills and night lights. He pulled up sharply at the entrance and said, "I say, Angel, I want you to come in here and choose yourself a hat."

"A hat," she echoed. "Oh, Philip, I—I—shall be too happy."

"All right, then," lifting her down as he spoke; "you can try what it feels like to be too happy. I can't say I know the sensation myself."

As the oddly-matched couple now entered the shop hand in hand, the smart, soldierly young man and the shabby little girl, an obsequious attendant emerged from some dark lair. At this time of year

business was slack, and the atmosphere of the ill-ventilated premises was reeking with oil, turmeric, and newly-roasted coffee.

"I want to look at some trimmed hats for this young lady," explained her cavalier.

"Oh, Phil," she whispered, squeezing his hand tightly in her tiny grasp, "it's the very first time I've been called a young lady."

"And won't be the last, we will hope," he answered.

"Have some iced lemonade, sir?" said a stout man in a gold skull-cap and thin white muslin draperies.

"No, thank you—but you, Angel—will you have some?" asked her cousin.

"I should love it," and she put her lips greedily to a brimming tumbler of her favourite beverage. Undoubtedly Angel was tasting every description of pleasure to-day.

"And now for the hats; here they come!" announced her companion, as a languid European assistant appeared with two in either hand.

"Oh, how lovely!" cried Angel, setting down the glass and clasping her hands in rapturous admiration.

These hats, be it known, were the usual stock in trade of a native shop up country, models that no sane woman in England would purchase or be seen in; massive satin or velvet structures, with lumps of faded flowers and tarnished gilt buckles, one more preposterous than another, all equally dusty, tumbled, and expensive, and all intended for full-grown wearers—if such could be beguiled into buying them. Gascoigne took a seat and proceeded to watch

his protégée's proceedings with the keenest amusement, and exhibited no desire to cut short her few blissful moments. Angel was absolutely happy, not had been, or was to be, but actually happy in the present moment—and the sight of such a condition is extremely rare.

The mite in short frock treated the shopwoman with all the airs of a grown customer, and was even more *difficile* and critical than her own mamma. First she tried on one hat, then another; and to see the little top-heavy figure, glass in hand, strutting and backing in front of a great spotty mirror, and contemplating herself from every point of view with the most anxious solemnity, was to all concerned a truly entertaining spectacle. Several torpid assistants had collected at a respectable distance, enjoying the comedy with faint grins as Angel gravely appeared, and disappeared, under various monstrosities. For a time she was sorely divided between a scarlet plush tam-o'-shanter and a green straw with yellow flowers. Finally it was a bright blue satin toque with mother-of-pearl buckles which captured her affections. She put it on, and took it off, then put it on again, whilst Gascoigne and the European attendant watched her attentively.

"I say, Angel, that won't do," he said, breaking the spell at last; "no, nor any single one of the lot. You'd look like an owl in an ivy bush."

"Oh, Philip, not really," she protested, and her eyes grew large with amazement.

"No, none of them are suitable. That thing you've on weighs pounds; you'd want a man to carry it.

I'll tell you what, perhaps this young lady here will fit you out with a nice straw hat, and trim it."

"Oh, yes, sir," she assented briskly. "I believe I have what will answer exactly," producing a pile of plain straws. "Try this on, missy."

But it was such a bare, uninteresting-looking article. Two great tears stood in Angel's eyes. These she bravely winked away, and said with a gulp, "Very well, Phil; I suppose you know best."

"I'll make it so smart, missy," said the sympathetic attendant, "with big bows of fresh white ribbon."

"And roses? Oh, Philip, say I am to have roses?" she pleaded with clasped hands, and a voice that was tragic.

"Yes, roses by all means, if they are indispensable to your happiness."

"Oh, they are—and pink ones."

"Then we will leave the matter entirely to you," said Gascoigne to the milliner, as he stood up; "a child's hat, you know, not a May bush."

And Miss Harris, who was rarely favoured with such a customer, gave Mr. Gascoigne an emphatic promise, and her sweetest smile. As a solace from being parted from her beloved blue toque, her cousin presented Angel with a large box of chocolates, a bottle of perfume, a silver thimble, and a doll, and the little creature returned to the dogcart with her arms full and her face radiant.

CHAPTER V

THE LUCKNOW ROAD

“AND now for a good spin along the Lucknow road,” said Gascoigne when they had extricated themselves from the teeming bazaar.

Oh, Lucknow road! How many times have you resounded to the steady tramp of armed men, the clattering of hoofs, the rumble of guns! What battles have been fought to guard you, what nameless graves of gallant fellows are scattered among the crops in your vicinity! But to-night all is peace; the moon rides high in the heavens, and the whole landscape seems flooded in silvery white. The pace at which Sally travelled created a current of fresh air, as she sped past tombs, shrines, villages, and between long avenues of trees. The bare, flat plains were just forty miles from the foot of the Himalayas, and in the cold weather the scene presented an unbroken stretch of rich cultivation. A sea of yellow waves, wheat and barley, sugar-cane, feathery white cotton, and acres and acres of poppies. Now the crops were gathered, and all that remained was a barren expanse parched to a dull dusty brown. The very trees, with their grey trunks and leafless branches, gave the scene a bleak and wintry appearance, although the air was like a furnace. It was a still, breathless night, save for the croaking of frogs, or the humming of a village tom-tom, and the couple

in the dogcart were as silent as their surroundings, absorbing the swiftly changing scene without exchanging a word, each being buried in their own reflections. Angel's thoughts were pleasant ones; her busy brain was occupied with visions of future triumphs—not unconnected with her present position, and her new hat.

Gascoigne's inner self was far, far away across the sea. He was driving with a little girl through deep country lanes, a girl then his playfellow, later his divinity, now lost to him, and figuratively laid in a grave and wrapped in roses and lavender. On the tombstone the strong god Circumstance had inscribed, "Here lies the love of Philip Gascoigne." The man was thinking of his love, the child of her new hat, and the four-legged animal of her supper. Once or twice he had been on the point of turning, but a piteous little voice beside him had pleaded, "Oh, please, not yet; oh, just another mile, well, half-a-mile," and they had passed the tenth milestone before Sally was pulled up and her head set once more towards Ramghur.

"Oh, dear," cried Angel, coming out of a dream, "I'm so sorry we are going back. I began to think I was in heaven."

"Upon my word, you are a funny child," exclaimed her cousin. "I don't fancy the hot weather in the North-West is many people's notion of Paradise."

"But there are horses and chariots there. At all events," she argued, "the Bible says so."

"Do you read the Bible much, Angel?"

"Yes. I love the Book of Revelations, which tells

all about gold and jewels and horses. I always read it on Sundays."

"And what do you read on week-days?"

"I have not much time. I sew a good deal for mother, and there are lessons, and going out walking with those children to the club gardens twice a day," and she gave a little impatient sigh. Gascoigne looked down at the small figure perched beside him, with pitying eyes, and thought of her dreary, colourless life.

"I'm reading a book now," she announced complacently.

"And what is it called?"

"The Mysteries of Paris."

"The *what?*"

"The Mysteries of Paris," raising her thin voice. "I heard Mrs. Du Grand telling mother it was thrilling—and so wicked. She rooted it out of the old stock in the Library."

"It's not fit for you to read."

"Have *you* read it?" she asked sharply.

"No, and don't want to. Does your mother allow you to read such stuff?"

"Mother does not know—she would not mind."

"I'm certain she would—it's a bad—I mean a grown-up book, and not fit for you."

"I've only read as far as two chapters—and it's so stupid."

"Then mind you don't read more, Angel, nor any grown-up books, if you would like to please *me*. Hullo, sit tight," he added quickly, as a white bullock suddenly rose from beside a shrine, starting Sally out of her wits. She made a violent spring

across the road—a spring that tested every buckle in her harness—and nearly capsized the cart. Then she broke away into a frantic gallop, with the trap rocking at her heels.

“No fear, Angel; you hold on to me,” said Gascoigne.

“But I’m not afraid,” rejoined a bold, clear voice. “I’m never afraid when I’m with you, Philip.”

“It’s all right,” he said presently, as Sally’s racing pace slackened and she gradually came back to her bit. “Sally is a coward; she thought she saw a ghost.”

“Yes; and it was only an old bullock,” scoffed the child. “But, cousin Phil, there *are* real ghosts, you know.”

“Where?”

“Oh,” spreading out her hands, “everywhere, all over the world—in the station—yes, and in your bungalow.”

“My poor, simple Angel! Who has been cramming you with this rot?”

“The servants,” she promptly replied; “and I’ve heard other people talking. The cook’s brother is your bearer, and yet, he would not go into your compound after dark if you gave him one hundred rupees.”

“Then he is a foolish man,” pronounced Gascoigne; “not that I am likely to offer him his price.”

“They say,” resumed the child, “where you keep your boxes and polo sticks used to be the dining-room, and that servants in queer old liveries can still be seen there.”

"Then I wish to goodness they'd clean up my saddles whilst they wait. And is that all?"

"No; an officer in uniform, a strange uniform not worn now, comes running in with a drawn sword, and chases a pretty lady from room to room. She wears a white muslin dress, and black satin shoes. He kills her in the front verandah—and her screams are awful."

"Dear me, Angel, what a blood-curdling tragedy! but you don't mean to say you believe it?"

"Oh, yes; Ibrahim says it is well known. There is another—I heard Mrs. Jones telling it to mother, and she said she knew it was true. Shall I go on?"

"Yes, if you like—it is quite an Indian night's entertainment."

"Well," beginning in a formal little voice, "some gentlemen were driving up from the station; they were very late, and they saw a mess house all lit up, and the compound packed with carriages and bullock bandies, and they said, 'Why, it is a big ball, and we never heard a word about it.' So they stopped on the road and looked on. They could see right into the room, and there were crowds of people dancing—but the strange thing was, there was not one face they knew."

"Well, I'm not surprised at that," exclaimed her listener derisively.

"Please don't interrupt—they drove on after a while——"

"They ought to have gone in to supper."

"*Philip!*" she expostulated. "Next morning they asked about the great ball in the cavalry lines, and people thought they were joking; there had not been

a dance for weeks, but these men were quite positive, and they rode down to have a look at the house. It had not been used for years and years, and was crammed with rubbish and old broken furniture; the compound was all grass and weeds, and there was not a trace or mark of a carriage."

"And what did they make of that?" inquired Gascoigne.

"Oh, people just shook their heads, and said something about an old story, and the mutiny, and that a great many ladies were killed in that messhouse one night—and the servants have heaps of tales."

"I don't want to hear their tales, and I wish you would not listen to them," he said sharply.

"Why?" with a look of bewildered injury, "how can I help it, when they are talking all round me? The ayah's sister and her niece come in, and bring a huka and sit on the floor of the nursery and gossip when mother is out, and I can't sleep; they talk, ever so much, all the station gup, oh, *such* stories. Why are you so solemn, cousin Phil?" she asked suddenly, gazing up at his face in the moonlight; "why are you so grave; what are you thinking about?"

"Then I will tell you, Angel; I am thinking about *you*—it is full time you were at home."

"So I am at home. Here we are—the gate is open. Oh, what a shy!" as Sally executed a deep curtsy to a long black shadow.

"I mean England," giving Sally a flip; "would you not like to go there?"

"No; for I don't want to leave mother. Anyway, she cannot afford to send me to school. She owes

such a *lot* of money; there she is on the verandah watching for us; and oh! I am so sorry this drive is over—thank you a million thousand times.”

“I am afraid we are rather late,” he called out to Mrs. Wilkinson, “but I’ve brought her back safe and sound.”

“Yes, thank goodness; it is after eight o’clock, and I began to be nervous.”

“I’m sorry I am behind time, but it is such a fine moonlight night, and Angel has been telling me stories.”

“Oh, she’s good enough at that!” sneered Colonel Wilkinson, with terrible significance. “Now, Angel, go off to your bed,” he added peremptorily; “the ayah has kept some cold rice pudding for you—mind you eat it,” and he waved her out of his sight. Then, turning his attention to the child’s charioteer, and refusing to notice his wife’s anxious signals, he continued, “I say, Gascoigne, if you don’t mind, you’ll be late for mess!”

It was all very well for Lena to suggest his staying to share pot luck, but Lena was not the house-keeper, or aware that the bill of fare consisted of a little soup and some brain cutlets.

“The bugle went five minutes ago,” he concluded. Gascoigne promptly accepted the hint (not that he craved for an invitation—were not Colonel Wilkinson’s dinners notorious?) and with a hasty good-bye immediately drove away.

Surely, this must have been one of the happiest days of Angel’s existence; her mother was prepared to find her in raptures, when she came to see her in her cot that night. She was therefore astonished

to discover the child in tears, sobbing softly under her breath—the cold rice-pudding untouched, and spurned.

“Darling, what is the matter?” inquired Mrs. Wilkinson anxiously. “Are you sick?”

“No,” sniffed her daughter in a lachrymose key.

“But you have not eaten your supper,” she expostulated; “are you sure you are quite well, dearie?”

“I am—quite—well.”

“Then,” now stirred to indignation, “do you mean to tell me, that after your delightful drive, and all your beautiful presents, you greedy, insatiable child, you are crying yourself to sleep?”

A heartrending sob was the sole reply to this question.

Mrs. Wilkinson’s thoughts flew to her spouse; he had been particularly impatient of Angel lately. She bent over the cot, and whispered into the ear of the little head buried in its pillow:

“Tell me, darling, what has happened? What is the trouble—who——?”

And a muffled voice moaned like some wounded animal:

“Phil—cousin Phil—he—he——” a burst of sobs interrupted her.

“He what?” impatiently.

“Oh, mummy, he never said good-bye to me.”

CHAPTER VI

LATE FOR MESS

THE bungalow occupied by Captain Gascoigne and his friend was one of the largest in Ramghur. Sixty years previously, it had been the residence of the general commanding the district, and now it was let to a couple of bachelors, at the miserable rental of thirty rupees a month, for it happened to be deplorably out of repair, inconveniently out of the way, and enjoyed the reputation of being haunted. This unfortunate habitation stood in a spacious compound, whose limits were absorbed in the surrounding terra-cotta coloured plain, covered with yawning fissures, and tufts of bleached grass. A few mango trees, guava trees, and a dry well, indicated the remains of a once celebrated garden, whilst under the tamarinds were three or four weather-worn tombs, the resting-place of Mahomedan warriors, who had been buried on the battle-field long before the days of the English Raj.

An imposing range of servants' quarters (at present crowded, as the retinue harboured all their relations, as well as lodgers) and a long line of stables testified to the former importance of this tumble-down abode, whose big reception-rooms, once the heart of social life, were now filled with boxes, empty packing-cases, saddlery, and polo sticks, and were the resort of white ants, roof cats, and scorpions.

The present tenants had naturally selected the most weather-tight quarters, and these were in opposite ends of the venerable residence. As Gascoigne came whirling through the entrance gate, he was way-laid by three dogs, a fox-terrier, an Irish terrier, and a nondescript hound, and it was immediately evident that he belonged to them, from their yelps of hearty welcome, and the manner in which all three scuttled up the drive in the wake of Sally Lunn.

As the cart stopped, and the syce sprang down, Shafto appeared in the verandah. He wore the usual hot-weather mess dress, spotless white linen, and a coloured silk cummerband, and looked strikingly handsome as he stood bareheaded in the moon-light, gravely contemplating his comrade.

"Upon my soul, Phil, I began to think the brute had smashed you up at last! I've been sitting here listening hard for twenty minutes, precisely as if I were your anxious grandmother. I know Sally's trot half a mile away. What kept you?"

"Down dogs, down," cried their master, as he descended. "I had no notion it was so late, and for a drive, this is the best time of the whole day."

"Whole night you mean," corrected Shafto; "it's half-past eight—where have you been? Sally looks as if she had had enough for once."

"She's had about twenty-two miles," admitted her owner, now taking off his cap and subsiding into one of the two long chairs which furnished the verandah. "The Lucknow road is like a billiard table, and we made our own wind."

"*We?*" ejaculated his listener.

"Yes, I took that child Angel from next door; it

was a rare treat for the poor little beggar, and she coaxed me to go on mile after mile."

"Oh, did she! Well, as long as she is only the angel next door I don't mind," said Shafto, tossing away the stump of a cigarette; "an angel in the house, I bar. This establishment is already the home of rest for lost dogs"—pointing to the trio—"ill-used ekka ponies, and a lame bullock. Don't, for God's sake, bring in a child."

"You need not alarm yourself," said his friend composedly. "I should not know what to do with her. The animals, at least, are grown up."

"And so is Angel—as old-fashioned as they make 'em. By the way, I forgot to ask you what she wanted yesterday?"

"Nothing," replied Gascoigne, stretching out his arms. "I say—Sally can pull—only to tell me that she was rather down on her luck."

"Not much luck to be down on, eh?" sneered his listener. "What with a smart mamma, a saving step-papa, and a squad of greedy little Wilkinsons, she must be a bit out of it, I should say. I wonder her father's people don't do something."

"Here you are," cried Gascoigne. "I am her father's cousin."

"Well, I won't permit you to interfere, or take her in; by Jove, no," said Shafto, springing to his feet. "Charity does not begin at this home. They say that, for all her fluffy hair and ethereal eyes, she is a cocksy, sly, mischievous little cat."

"Poor mite! Can't 'they' let even a child alone? They must be short of subjects."

"You allude to the station gossips, and no doubt

times are bad—so many of their ‘cases’ are in the hills. Personally, I don’t care for little girls with wistful eyes and a craving for chocolate.”

“I know you don’t,” assented the other promptly. “*You* prefer well-grown young women with seductive black orbs and a craving for sympathy.”

“Bosh! There’s the mess bugle. You take half-an-hour to tub and change; you’ll be late for dinner.”

“Oh, I’ll get something when I go over.”

“Here,” said Shafto, motioning to a syce to bring up his pony. Then, turning to his comrade, “You are a rum customer. Harder than nails, yet soft as putty in some ways.”

“Oh, not as soft as Billy Shafto,” he protested with a laugh.

“Yes. If a fellow is in a scrape—Gascoigne. Duty to do—Gascoigne. For the sick and afflicted—Gascoigne. Dinnerless to humour a child—Gascoigne.” Whilst he spoke he put his foot in the stirrup and mounted, and as he wheeled about he gave a view hulloa, shouted “Vive Gascoigne!” and galloped down the avenue *ventre à terre*. For a moment Gascoigne and the dogs sat staring at the cloud of dust the pony’s hoofs had raised behind him, and then the three animals gathered round to have a word or two with their master.

Each of these waifs had a history of his own. Train, the fox-terrier, was found in the railway station, a lost, distracted dog, evidently a stranger in a strange land, for he did not understand a word of Hindustani, and he shrank appalled from the blandishments of the Telegraph Baboo. He was middle-aged, English, and a gentleman. What was his past?

Gunner, an Irish terrier, possibly country-born, had been left behind by a battery of artillery, suddenly ordered up country, and for weeks he had haunted their lines, heart-broken and starving; even now he constantly called at his old quarters, to see if *they* had come back?

Toko was a stray, brought in, in an emaciated condition, by the two others, and was believed to have been the property of a man who had died of cholera the previous rains. These three casualties were now beyond the reach of want, and were well looked after. They employed a dog boy, whose duty it was to wash, feed, and exercise them; but they were fiercely independent, and objected to going out for a walk at the end of a chain, merely to be tied up, whilst their attendant gambolled behind a wall with various other urchins. When not enjoying a scamper with their master they took themselves out with great decorum, and it was a funny sight to meet the three strolling leisurely along, precisely like their superiors, or cantering across the maidan almost abreast. Naturally, their friends and foes were identical, and it was a truly brave dog who dared to raise his bristles at the trio. They had their various individual tastes, and Train and Toko secretly felt that it was a pity to see a dog of Gunner's age and size so passionately addicted to chasing sparrows.

Gascoigne and the trio sat in the moonlight in front of the old bungalow, silently enjoying one another's society, till a neighbouring gurra, striking nine, warned Gascoigne that it was time to dress and dine. All the same he was not in the least hungry, and only for the susceptibilities of his bearer,—who

was an abject slave to convention, and would have considered his conduct erratic and peculiar,—he would gladly have remained sitting in the verandah with his three dumb friends. Gascoigne's drive with Angel had resulted in a paradox—it had effectively taken away his appetite, and supplied him with food for reflection. Poor little neglected ne'er-do-well! What was to be her fate?

CHAPTER VII

MRS. DAWSON'S DRESSES

THE hot weather was in full possession of Ramghur, and, as a natural consequence, the station became deserted. Various bragging individuals, who had announced their determination to "face it this year," had at the first boom of its artillery—that fierce midday blast,—closed their bungalows, distributed their pets and flowers, lent their cows, and carriages, among their friends, and departed precipitately to cooler regions. It was a sickly season; already the bazaar prediction had been more than justified. Only those whom duty or poverty chained to the cantonment were to be found at their posts, and these were to be seen, very late or very early, driving about the dusty roads, with haggard white faces.

It is a well-established fact, that one hot weather endured in company draws people more nearly together than a dozen cold seasons. There is a general relaxing of stiffness, a putting off of armour, a reliance on one another, and a liberal exchange of sympathy—and secrets;—undoubtedly a fellow feeling makes one wondrous kind. For example, if a cynic happened to remark what friends two sharply contrasting ladies had become, "Oh, they spent a hot weather together in Kalipore," would be accepted as an unanswerable reply. Moreover, it is undisputed, that some of the best matrimonial prizes have been snatched out of the heat of the plains, by maidens

who clung to their parents, and braved the consequences. Thus, they occasionally made the acquaintance of some bored and solitary bachelor, who, failing to obtain leave, presently consoled himself with a wife.

The band of the Native Cavalry,—Mr. Shafto's Regiment,—played thrice a week in the club gardens, and then the pale remnant of Europeans (and many brilliant Eurasians) assembled to what the natives term "eat the air" and exchange the contents of letters from the hills, and the delinquencies of their domestics.

Everywhere beyond the gardens the atmosphere was that of a brickkiln. Within, among the trees, shrubs, and glistening foliage plants, the nostrils were greeted by the smell of hot earth, and a recently watered green-house,—that is an aroma peculiar to India. In the early morning, immediately after sunrise, the club was at its best; thronged with members who came to study the telegrams, glance at the papers, and pick up any stray crumbs of local news. It was thus that the youngest Miss Brewer first allured Mr. Pontefract into conversation on the subject of "a fire in the Bazaar." Hitherto he had thought of her (if he ever did think of her) as a plain, heavy young woman, who could neither ride nor dance, but just lob over the net at tennis. Now he discovered, thanks to the hot weather, that she was a surprisingly taking girl, with a good deal in her, including brains. She talked well (and shared his views on the subject of the club soda-water, and Sunday tennis); moreover, she was a devout listener.

Between listening and talking, the moments flew; at last, the increasing heat, and the clamour of the coppersmith bird, awakened the pair to the fact that it was seven o'clock, and much too late an hour to be abroad; and then, as Miss Brewer's pony carriage boasted a hood, she offered a seat to her new acquaintance, and enjoyed the pleasure and triumph of conveying the rising civilian to his own door. She carried him off in every sense of the word, in fact—she was a particularly “taking” girl. This drive was the prelude to greater events—to meetings at dawn, to walks after dark, to little dinners, little presents,—and an engagement. Yes, it was quite true, Tilly Brewer, the unprepossessing, the dowdy, was about to marry the best *parti* in Ramghur; and when the young ladies in the hills heard the tidings, they each and all registered a mental vow to remain below next season. It is so easy to make such resolutions when you are in a perfect climate.

The talk of the engagement created an agreeable break in the long monotonous days, and mere acquaintances exhibited quite an affectionate interest in Tilly's trousseau, presents, and prospects.

However, early in May, another topic cropped up which entirely eclipsed the marriage preparations, and afforded food for incessant discussion until the end of the rains; in fact, the story of “Mrs. Dawson's dresses” created such an uproar and commotion, that it got into some of the local papers, and every one of the letters home.

Mrs. Dawson, the Judge's wife, was a prim, spare woman of a certain age—and, it was said, uncertain temper. She had a cool, stiff manner, and an air of

critical aloofness that seriously discounted her popularity. This lady was Mrs. Wilkinson's most serious rival in the matter of dress, and if her taste was less artistic, and her ideas lacked courage, she employed a court milliner, and owned a long purse. It must be admitted that her toilettes were both varied and expensive. "Stiff and old-maidish," was Mrs. Wilkinson's verdict—for she never soared to that lady's daring transformations, and condemned her dazzling triumphs as "theatrical and loud." Twice a year Mrs. Dawson received a large box or two from home, containing a fashionable outfit for the approaching season, and the envious pangs the arrival of these treasures occasioned Mrs. Wilkinson, no one—no, not even her closest friend—had ever guessed.

A consignment of costumes had recently arrived per ss. *Arcadia*, and Mrs. Dawson invited all her neighbours to inspect them. The dresses were to be on view for two succeeding afternoons, but their owner omitted to despatch a little note to Mrs. Wilkinson. She would see all the toilettes later on in public, and, meanwhile, as she might steal some of the novel ideas, and was quite capable of carrying away a Paris pattern "in her eye," the poor lady was cruelly excluded. Late one evening Mrs. Rattray dropped in on Mrs. Wilkinson, *en route* from the exhibition. She was a lively, fair woman, with an immense stock of superfluous enthusiasm. As soon as she had found a seat, and unfurled her fan, she began,

"Well, my dear, I've never seen such frocks as she has got this time."

"No," cried her hostess eagerly; "you have been to the show—do tell me all about them. I am dying to know what the dresses are like. French, of course—she said so."

"Yes," drawing a long breath. "There is a grey *crêpe de chine* and silver, like the moon in a mist, with very long, tight sleeves, and a sort of double skirt—it's a dream. There is a lemon satin with Egyptian embroidery and a long train, a black silk canvas with lace sleeves, piece lace—you could easily copy that; and there is a lovely mauve tea-gown, with a yoke of point d'Alençon, and knots of black velvet with long ends, to which I lost my heart—it's quite my style—but she never lends a pattern, you know."

"Yes," agreed her listener, "we all know that."

"Then there are hats, and toques, and feathers, and silk petticoats. I never saw so many pretty things all at once. I think she got some smart cousin to choose them, for they are not in the same style as her usual dresses—really, you won't know her."

Further details, descriptions, and even sketches, prolonged the interview for more than an hour. Meanwhile Angel sat growing in a corner, totally unnoticed, but absorbing every word of the conversation with a curious expression on her little elfish face.

"I must say, it is most marked, her not inviting you," said Mrs. Rattray, as she rose at last. "Several people noticed it, and Mrs. Gordon was wondering why you had not come; 'the show was so much in your line.' Of course, I did not tell her why you stayed away; at any rate, you will see one of the

frocks on Sunday, a white Chinese silk, much too young for Mrs. Dawson; I'm sure she is long past forty. Well, good-bye, dear, I knew you'd be dying to hear all about the exhibition, so I just ran in to tell you." And then Mrs. Rattray bustled out to her victoria, leaving her stricken hostess to digest her news as best she might. Alas! what were two or three pretty muslins, or even a new lilac foulard, against Mrs. Dawson's battle array, gowns direct from Doucet and Rouff? Oh, money must tell in the end! and, burying her face among her sofa cushions,—for she was weak and run down,—Mrs. Wilkinson wept long and bitterly, she who but five minutes ago had been all animation and smiles.

Two mornings later, Mrs. Rattray encountered Mrs. Dawson in the club library. Greatly to her surprise, the latter accosted her at once; for, as a rule, she merely bestowed a cool nod.

"Have you heard about my dresses?" she began excitedly.

"But you forget that I have inspected them," said the other; "I never saw anything half so exquisite, or so——"

"Exquisite no longer!" broke in Mrs. Dawson with a catch in her voice; "what do you think? I had some friends to my little show yesterday, all the gowns laid out in my bedroom, just as when you came,—and then we went into the drawing-room to tea. After they had left, I sent for the ayah, intending to help her to fold the things, and put them in tissue paper." Here she paused for breath, and seemed curiously agitated.

"Why, yes, of course," assented Mrs. Rattray.

She stood with her hands on the back of a chair, facing the narrator, and wondering at her emotion. It was something novel to see Mrs. Dawson, of all people, thus mentally dishevelled.

"When I went into my room with a light," she resumed, "I found that all my beautiful things had been cut to pieces—into little—little bits!"

"What!" cried Mrs. Rattray, raising her voice till it was almost a scream.

"Yes, every one of them, and done most systematically—nothing escaped, not even my poor feather fan, nor a hat, or a blouse. The ayah kept crying, 'Look, look, look,' till I was sick of looking. Sleeves were hacked out of dresses, great pieces slashed out of the bodices, skirts cut right across, in all directions; even the artificial flowers were torn to pieces, and the fingers snipped off my evening gloves." She paused, and there was a dead silence, for Mrs. Rattray could find no words adequate to the occasion. She simply stared, with her topee pushed back from her forehead, and her lips wide apart.

"And—the grey *crêpe*?" she stammered out at last.

"A rag now. The lemon satin only fit for patchwork. There is not even enough left to make a sofa cushion. It was all done in about half-an-hour—and with a huge pair of dirzee's scissors."

"But who did it?" cried her listener, breathlessly. "Have you no suspicions?"

"No, that is the strange part of it; not a soul was seen or heard about the premises. All the doors in the verandah were wide open, the chokedar was on duty, and he saw no one."

"Then what does the ayah say?" inquired Mrs. Rattray judiciously.

"Oh, she vows it was an evil spirit, and if she had not been idling in her go-down, but had come in directly the visitors had left, this frightful affair would not have happened." Here Mrs. Dawson's voice became husky; however, she soon recovered her self-possession, and continued, "Nothing was taken—no, not even an inch of ribbon—everything is there. So it was no thief. My husband will have it that it was Captain Moore's monkey."

Mrs. Rattray drew a long breath. At last she inquired, with studied deliberation:

"And what is your own opinion?"

"I believe it was the work of some one who knew more about clothes than a dumb animal," responded the victim of the outrage; "and yet, it is like a monkey's trick, so unnecessary, and so mischievous."

"So wicked, I call it," cried Mrs. Rattray. "I must say you are bearing it marvellously well. It is more than I could do. I have no fortitude."

"What is the good of worrying? The thing is done; no amount of worrying will restore my pretty frocks, and I cannot afford to replace them for some time; that lemon satin cost forty guineas, and I'd be ashamed to tell you what I paid for the lilac tea-gown."

"You have no clue?" reiterated Mrs. Rattray.

"Unfortunately, I have not even that small consolation. Monkey or demon, it left no trace. Well now, I must be going—the sun is getting so strong I have a dreadful headache as it is."

And Mrs. Dawson went sadly down the steps, crawled into her carriage, and was driven away.

But Mrs. Rattray lingered yet awhile, despite the temperature, in order to discuss the tragedy with Mrs. Jones. Ere they separated, she said, "How pleased Mrs. Wilkinson will be! She will have it all her own way now."

"Yes," assented her companion, "she lives to dress, and dresses to live—it is only her clothes that hold her to earth. She is a mere shadow. Don't you think she looks frightfully ill, and that it is disgraceful that Colonel Wilkinson has kept her and the children down for three hot weathers? I declare it is next door to murder, and if she dies he ought to be hanged."

"She wants a change badly," admitted Mrs. Rattray, "but this news will act as a restorer, equal to two months' hill air."

"Colonel Wilkinson is a shameless screw," resumed the other; "everyone knows that he puts away half his pay monthly, that he never subscribes to anything—'poverty and a large family' his cry—and that poor Mrs. Wilkinson finds it almost impossible to get him to give her a twenty-rupee dress."

"I think Mrs. Dawson might have asked her to her show; leaving one out is always so pointed."

"But it was intended to be pointed. Mrs. Dawson was so afraid of having her gowns copied," pleaded her friend.

"Not much to copy now, is there?" retorted Mrs. Rattray; "and is it not strange that they have no suspicions, and no clue?"

"No, neither the one nor the other," rejoined Mrs.

Jones, shaking her head solemnly. But Mrs. Jones was mistaken; there *was* a clue had Mrs. Wilkinson's ayah suffered it to pass from her hands.

For one whole morning the dirzee's scissors were nowhere to be found, and a dirzee, minus his scissors, is as a dragon without his horse.

Kadir Bux called upon all his gods to witness that he had left them in his basket the previous day. Who, then, had taken them? At last, after much loud talk, and an exhaustive search, the scissors were discovered under a fashion book in the drawing-room, and, behold! there was a tiny scrap of lemon satin stuck fast between the blades.

Then the ayah, who had unearthed them, looked Angel straight in the eyes, and cried, "O child of the devil!"

But she put the tell-tale scrap into the cook-house fire,—and held her tongue.

CHAPTER VIII

THE PICNIC

THE ruthless destruction of Mrs. Dawson's dresses supplied a subject for conversation, not merely in the station, but also in the "Burra Bazaar," where the most private concerns of the sahibs, and mem-sahibs, are openly debated and discussed.

Speculation was active, but neither the station nor the bazaar could hazard the vaguest conjecture, or trace even the ghost of a clue.

The devil theory was dismissed with the contempt which it deserved; the monkey suggestion was equally scorned, since the defamed ape was dead, having departed this life two days previous to the outrage, and thereby established an unimpeachable *alibi*. If not the monkey, who then? And echo cried, Who? all over the arid, torpid cantonment. There was no reply, and the destruction of Mrs. Dawson's Europe frocks, like one of the historical crimes that have baffled humanity, remains undiscovered until the present day.

The next sensation was a moonlight picnic, given by the bachelors of Ramghur; the rendezvous was the Chinglepat road five miles out, on a low mound between the highway and the river. On the occasion the lady moon appeared unusually large and brilliant, as if aware that she was responsible for the feast; the night was still and breathless, but the hock

was still iced. Like most bachelor entertainments, the picnic was a success; around and across the cloth flew corks, crackers, jokes, and chaff; the poor hot-weather folk were eating, drinking, and making merry just as if the thermometer did not stand at 98, and the merriest and most animated member of the company was Mrs. Wilkinson. She wore a charming white toilette, in which she totally eclipsed her rival, and was not unconscious of the fact; but she was also aware at the back of all her smiles that she herself was present entirely without her doctor's knowledge, and felt like an escaped prisoner, who was bound to be captured some day. But then she wanted so much to wear her new dress. It was modelled from Mrs. Rattray's vivid description of one of Mrs. Dawson's celebrated costumes, and was so exceedingly novel and becoming that she felt it no more or less than her duty to exhibit this ghost of a Paris toilette to her many admirers. To Mrs. Dawson it was indeed a phantom frock.

All the world knew that Mrs. Wilkinson was amazingly clever, but how could she reproduce a garment which she had never seen? Here was yet another mystery. Angela, who by all domestic laws should have been in bed and asleep, had been permitted to join the company as Mr. Gascoigne's guest, and was supremely happy. She wore her new hat, lavishly trimmed with roses, and her best and simplest manners. Her host had brought her in his cart; indeed, he now drove her out daily, as he believed that it did the wan little creature good to get fresh air, such as it was, and it afforded one means of removing her from her stepfather's orbit.

During these drives her cousin occasionally endeavoured in an awkward, clumsy fashion to improve the young mind, which was at present "wax to receive, and marble to retain;" his teaching was more adapted to a boy than a girl. His lessons—a mere sentence—brief, but pithy, showed her his abhorrence of lying, cowardice, and all mean actions. (Poor Angel listened with a tingling face, for she lived in an atmosphere of falsehood, and was conscious of certain small acts that were not creditable, chiefly connected with jam, hair ribbons, and beads; but in her heart Angel knew that she was no coward.) These seeds, casually cast by the wayside, and as casually received, were planted, and subsequently bore fruit, in the child's somewhat rocky little heart.

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To return to the moonlight picnic. Colonel Wilkinson was present in a grey dirzee-made flannel suit rather tight for his rounded proportions; his moustache was waxed to exaggeration; he wore a new pink washing tie, and he made himself conspicuous in ushering guests to their places, arranging the viands, concocting the salad, and distributing the iced hock—for he was always exceedingly hospitable in other people's houses. At present the company were assembled under the vault of heaven, but the stout little officer presided at the end of the tablecloth, with his fat legs crossed Buddha-wise, carved the cold Guinea fowl and ham, and pressed delicacies on his neighbours so assiduously, that a casual arrival would have supposed that in him he beheld the host. No one could be more genial or convivial at

his neighbour's board than Richard Wilkinson, Lieutenant-Colonel.

Angel shared a rug with her mother, and now and then stole her hand into hers and squeezed it gently, sure token of her absolute content; the pair were seated exactly opposite to Mrs. Dawson, who looked depressed and commonplace in an old-fashioned brown tussore garment. The child contemplated her gravely, with a mysteriously complacent expression in her large eyes; her stare exasperated the lady to such a pitch that more than once she was on the point of addressing her; the hot weather has a knack of warping people's tempers and reducing their nerves to fiddle-strings, and the combination of Angel's curious gaze and her mother's "model gown" was almost too much for Mrs. Dawson's equanimity.

After dinner there were songs and games, and some wandered away in twos and threes down to the river. This was a tributary of Mother Gunga, a holy river, now much shrunken; its waters moved along with a deliberate solemnity befitting a sacred stream. The farther bank was clothed with tall reeds, and was the well-known haunt of alligators. Mrs. Wilkinson and Mr. Shafto were looking for one in company, and as they gazed up and down the banks more than one grey log of wood had misled them. Had Mrs. Wilkinson's doctor been of the party, he would have assured her that in those thin shoes and transparent dress, as she stood breathing malaria on the brink of the sluggish stream, she was boldly courting death.

"There are generally three or four big fellows at the bend," said Shafto. "I've seen them when I

come to that jheel to shoot snipe;" and he stooped to pick up a stone.

"Oh, Mr. Shafto," gasped an agonised voice, "did you see it?"

"The alligator?" flinging a stone as he spoke. "Yes; there he goes. Mark over. Watch him scuttling into the river."

"No, no, no," stammered Mrs. Wilkinson. "The face—the face of a woman—floating past. It was just under the water."

"Why, I declare, you are quite upset!" exclaimed her companion. "I'm most frightfully sorry you've seen—anything. Of course, you know that the natives bring all their dead to the river?"

"Yes, yes," she assented, with a shiver. "I've not lived in Ramghur for four years for nothing; but it gave me a shock. It looked like the face of—a white woman."

"That was simply the effect of the moonlight," he responded. "Come along; the river is making you morbid, and it's not a sound thing to loiter near it after sundown—you know they say it's full of malaria. Let me turn your thoughts inland. Now, there is something worth looking at," and he pointed to the northern horizon, on which glimmered the long line of snows.

"Ah, yes," she ejaculated. "How I love the Himalayas! my happiest days have been spent there, and my saddest. I wonder if I shall ever see them nearer than I do now?" and she sighed profoundly.

"Why, of course you will," rejoined Shafto promptly. "We shall all be there next season, please goodness, and have a ripping time; and, I say, Mrs.

Wilkinson, at our first ball up there let me here and now engage you for the first waltz."

"Very well," she agreed, with a forced laugh; "it's rather a long way ahead, is it not?"

"Nothing like taking time by the forelock—a year soon runs round. Here comes the Colonel," as the little squat figure bore down on them.

"I say, you good people," he bawled, "what about refreshments? Does anyone want some iced coffee? Lena, I can recommend the brew of iced milk punch."

His wife waved a negative, and then exclaimed, "Why, I see they are beginning to go; the Gordons and the Rattrays are off."

"What a shame!" protested her host. Yes, two carriages had just driven away—people who are obliged to rise at four o'clock cannot afford to keep late hours, and by half-past ten the scene of recent revelry was utterly deserted. A family of jackals supped right royally on the remains of the cold viands, and an inquisitive alligator gulped down an empty soda-water bottle.

* * * * *

Angel, who was half-asleep, accompanied her mother in the victoria, and Colonel Wilkinson accepted a seat in Mr. Gascoigne's dogcart. He was by no means as stout-hearted as his figure would suggest, but held on convulsively with one hand as they dashed up the bridge, and halted in the middle of a sentence which he did not conclude until they were a quarter of a mile away on the other side.

He had been discoursing of his own health, and

then of his wife's health, and imparting his fears to his Jehu.

"Lena was so delicate now, and so subject to fever," he declared. "She has a weak heart, too, and must go to the hills next season; in fact, they all wanted a change."

"Indeed they do," assented Gascoigne, with considerable warmth, "especially Angela. She is too old to be in India."

"Then I wish I saw my way to sending her out of it," rejoined her stepfather, "and the chance of never seeing her again."

To this aspiration Gascoigne made no reply.

"I suppose you think I'm a brute, now, don't you?" inquired his companion.

"Since you will have it, I think you are a stepfather—that's all."

"But like a fellow in a story-book, eh? Come, now. Well, I'm an honest, plain man"—the latter fact was sufficiently manifest—"and I'll tell you the truth. I could have liked the child—not the same way as my own, of course—but still well enough; and the only girl too. But I cannot stand her; she is a double-faced, dangerous imp and extraordinarily daring. When you think she is quiet and on her good behaviour she is certain to be hatching something awful; she has a talent for bringing off the most unexpected things. Ah, you laugh, but I warn you, Gascoigne——"

Here he paused, for the sensitive mare had taken fright at a hideous hog, who, with his great bristles all erect, went grunting across the road, and broke into a wild gallop.

"Now, I say, young fellow," he shouted in agonised alarm, "no foolery—no larking—don't let her get away, for God's sake! Remember, I've a family depending on me," and as he spoke he clutched Gascoigne's arm with the grip of the drowning.

"Oh, you'll be all right," answered the driver, angrily shaking off the grasp; "there's no fear." He was disgusted with his guest, for whose cowardice and meanness he had the most supreme contempt. He did not permit Sally to "get away," but he suffered her to go at a pace that brought his companion's heart into his mouth, and, as a natural result, the remainder of the drive was silence.

CHAPTER IX

THE BEQUEST

ALTHOUGH the temperature was that of a bake-house, and not a breath of air stirred the drowsy bamboos, or the long seed-pods of the bare acacias; yet, as Mrs. Wilkinson was driven homewards, her teeth chattered, and her hands were as cold as ice—premonitory symptoms of a severe attack of fever. Bitterly she now blamed herself for her folly in lingering by the riverside, and she recalled what the river's bosom carried with a gasping shudder. Was it a warning to her? No, no; she was but nine-and-twenty—her life was not yet half spent. She drew the sleeping child into her arms, and oh, how warm the little creature felt, in her own deathly cold embrace!

* * * * *

In a day or two it became widely known that Mrs. Wilkinson was dangerously ill—hers was no mere ordinary local fever, but a really grave case. The doctor's closed gharry drove into the corner compound three times a day; kind neighbours came late and early, bringing ice, jelly, and all manner of delicacies, hoping to tempt the appetite of the invalid, and to eke out Colonel Wilkinson's meagre catering. Mrs. Rattray, who had no family cares, took up her post in the sick-room, and relieved a trained nurse, whilst other ladies—and this is ever an action of fatal significance—carried off the children with

their toys, ayahs, and sleeping-cots; but Angel ran home every night and lay on the mat outside her mother's door.

"If you move me, or touch me, I shall *scream*," such was her diabolical threat, and as Angel was known to be a child of her word, she was suffered to remain undisturbed. There she stayed, hour after hour, wide awake, and motionless as a stone. In spite of all efforts on the part of the doctor and nurses, the patient grew worse—the fever, like an internal fire, seemed to consume the slender thread of her existence. The verandah was now utterly deserted, even by the dirzee; the plants were withered and black from want of water; insolent crows promenaded over the matting, and the voices of the servants were hushed. One could almost guess from the exterior of the premises that the mistress of the house lay dying within. Colonel Wilkinson sat alone in his dim little office; he had not the heart to read or write, or even to tot up his accounts. An occasional low conference with Mrs. Rattray or the doctor, and a spare and solitary meal, alone broke the hot, heavy hours.

These whisperings conveyed bad news; his wife's condition was extremely grave, and he could not hold himself blameless. Instead of investing those six thousand rupees in jute and cotton mills, he ought to have sent her and her children to the hills. He was face to face with his own conscience. He confessed to himself that he was too fond of money. Was this a case of saving money and losing life? Remorse is a stern acquaintance, and Colonel Wilkinson blamed himself bitterly. Sad to relate,

in spite of all these searchings of heart, such is the force of habit, and so strongly was he held by the grasp of avarice, within half an hour of his self-condemnation Colonel Wilkinson was out in the compound announcing to the milkman "that, now the children were from home, one measure was sufficient;" and he took the same opportunity of informing his cook "that a *two* anna chicken was ample for broth."

That same evening the bulletin was more favourable; the patient had recovered consciousness; she ceased to ramble about gores and whalebone, dresses and debts; she slept for several hours, and in the morning begged to see the children. Afterwards she talked for some time with Colonel Wilkinson, and gave him two bills to settle—bills which she would never have ventured to show him had she been in her normal state of health.

"Please pay these, Richard," she faltered; "they have been a terrible nightmare on my mind for months." Colonel Wilkinson pooh-poohed the accounts, and thrust them unexamined into his pocket. His spirits rose—he became sanguine. He declared to Mrs. Rattray that "when Lena could think of bills she was on the mend, and he was determined to write for a house at Mussouri by the night's post (even now he grudged a rupee or two for a telegram) and move her at once. She would be all right as soon as she was out of Ramghur. All she wanted was a change." In the midst of their conference, both Colonel Wilkinson and Mrs. Rattray were a good deal taken aback by hearing the sick woman express a desire to speak to Philip Gascoigne.

"Gascoigne, my dear," expostulated her husband; "what an extraordinary idea! Oh, you must not think of seeing him—it would be extremely bad for you."

"It will be worse for me if I do not see him," she answered, with an unexpected force. "I have something to say to him; please do not worry, but send for him at once."

An invalid's whim must necessarily be humoured, and whilst her husband went away to despatch a note, Lena Wilkinson desired her ayah to dress her hair—yes, to get the irons and crimp and curl it, and then array her in a pink satin tea-jacket, fasten a row of pearls round her neck, and bring her her rings and bangles. Mrs. Rattray assisted at this melancholy toilette; she was well aware of the patient's ruling passion—a passion strong in death. There, in the open wardrobe from which the ayah had brought the tea-jacket, hung rows of pretty gowns, and conspicuous among them that copy of Mrs. Dawson's white silk which she and Mrs. Wilkinson had manufactured with such mischievous enjoyment.

As soon as the dressing up of the weak and gasping moribund was concluded, when she was propped up with pillows, her fan and handkerchief placed beside her, she faltered out:

"Give me some of the medicine—a double dose—yes, and when Mr. Gascoigne comes show him in at once." Then, as she looked at Mrs. Rattray, "I wish to see him alone—on family business."

"Cannot Colonel Wilkinson——" began her friend persuasively.

But she cut her short with a quick gesture of dissent.

"Very well, dear," agreed her nurse, "I will bring him in the moment he arrives; but promise me not to talk much, or to let him stay more than five minutes."

"Oh, I promise nothing; it is for him to do that," panted the invalid. "But I—won't keep him long."

When the visitor, greatly bewildered, was ushered into a large darkened room, with a slowly moving punkah, he was prepared to see a certain change in his cousin Lena, but he was horrified when he beheld her, half sitting up, arrayed in pink satin and pearls, her hair elaborately dressed, her eyes glittering with fever—death in her face. Oh, why did Mrs. Rattray lend herself to this frightful mockery? He glanced over at that blameless lady, who obviously avoided his eye.

"Well, Phil—so good of you to come," said the invalid in a weak voice. "I'm a little better to-day, and I want so much to have a talk with you."

As she concluded, Mrs. Rattray, who had placed a chair for the visitor, stole out on tiptoe, dropping the purdah softly behind her.

"You should not talk, or see anyone, Lena," he protested, still standing, "and I am not going to stay."

"Oh, yes, just for a few minutes," she pleaded, laying a burning hand on his wrist, "for I have something most urgent to say to you, and until I say it I cannot rest in peace. It is about Angel; sit down, won't you," pointing to the chair, "and where I can see you."

Gascoigne obeyed her in silence.

"Philip," she continued, gazing at him with her wonderfully eloquent blue eyes, "I am—going to die."

He raised his hand in a quick gesture of protest.

"No," she resumed. "Listen—you can speak for the next forty years—I shall be dumb for ever—in a few hours. Philip, I shall die happy—yes, quite happy—if you will promise me one thing."

He glanced at her, and bent his head.

"Will you—take charge of Angel?"

This request was succeeded by a silence only broken by the wheezy creaking of the punkah rope. Philip Gascoigne was not naturally impulsive, a promise from him carried its full weight. The singular difference between Philip and his house-mate was this, that Shafto performed less than he promised, whilst Gascoigne was ever better than his word. He turned away his gaze from those two all-compelling tragic eyes, looked down on the floor, and strove to rally his scattered senses. He must immediately realise what this promise signified. It meant that he should educate Angel, and become her guardian; there was no one else to accept the post, as far as he could see. Tony's relations had cast him off when he married; Lena was a penniless orphan. There remained but Colonel Wilkinson. As he pondered the question, the dying woman seemed to devour him with her eyes. At last he looked up and met them steadily, and said:

"Yes, Lena, I will."

"I know I am asking an enormous favour," she whispered. "I am imposing on your youth and

generosity, but I am desperate, and to whom else can I turn? You are the only Gascoigne I know, and you understand that Richard and Angel could never live together. He detests her; she loathes him. On the other hand—she loves you.”

Gascoigne was about to speak, but once more she prevented him.

“It is a strange legacy to bequeath to a young man, and you are but six-and-twenty, Phil—I am leaving in your charge a child of nine, uneducated, undisciplined, and born and bred in India. But you are well off—you have a private income, and she will not cost you much. Once educated, she can earn her own living, and give you no more trouble—if you will only tide her over the next seven years. Philip,” she continued in a louder voice, suddenly raising herself with an immense effort, “if you will do this good action, I believe it will bring you a great blessing—dying people see far, and I can see—that.”

Here she paused, and fell back on her pillows completely exhausted.

“I will certainly carry out your wishes, Lena,” he answered impressively. “I will send Angel home, educate her, provide for her, and watch over her always—or until she marries.”

“Oh, you dear, dear fellow!” sobbed Mrs. Wilkinson, with tears running down her sunken cheeks. “Words cannot thank you—Angel will—give you—deeds.”

“After all, she is my cousin, Lena—I have no belongings——”

“No, not yet,” interposed his listener; “and it is not to every man I would trust the child; but you

are honourable and high-minded—you will be her big brother.”

“I will be her guardian; I am nearly twenty years older than she is.”

“Only seventeen, Philip,” corrected his cousin. “Well, at any rate, some day Angel will repay you—I feel an inspiration to tell you this.”

“But I don’t want any payment, Lena.”

“You have lifted a load from my heart. It would have been impossible for Angel to have remained with Richard; they are like fire and oil, and what would have been her fate? Oh, Philip, it is such a tender little heart, and how she will miss me! Poor Dick, he only sees her faults, not her good qualities. She is strong-willed, jealous, reckless, and revengeful, but she will do anything for love. She would die for a person she loved. Remember that love is the key to her nature, *never* forget that. I may confess to you now that Angel is my favourite child, my own little fluffy-haired baby; when we two were all alone in the world, then she was all the world to me.”

“Lena,” he said, suddenly leaning forward, and speaking with a touch of passion in his voice, “you may rely on me—I will do all I can to make her happy.”

“I know you won’t be stern, Philip; you will make allowances for her odd, wild ways; you will love her a little—and oh, do forgive me for the charge I am laying on your young shoulders.”

“There is nothing to forgive—that’s all nonsense, you know,” he said. “Anyway, I would have looked after Angel; I am her next of kin out here.”

"Yes, poor darling; and only for you she would be destitute indeed. I have nothing to leave her but these," and Mrs. Wilkinson touched, as she spoke, her pearl necklace and bangles. "Her father was lavishly extravagant and gave me this," indicating a splendid diamond ring, "and though often hard up, I have never parted with it. I somehow felt that Angel had a claim on it. Let her have it when she is eighteen."

"Certainly," he answered; "but I trust you may live to wear it yourself, Lena. Why should you not pull through?"

"Oh, I don't know—I may—I may," she faltered; "but now I have told you my wishes I will not keep you. Good-bye," and she held out her hand, and as he took it she turned away her face and burst into low, agonising sobs. She had entirely exhausted her last reserve of strength. Mrs. Rattray now entered the room and beckoned the visitor out, saying:

"Lena is completely overwrought; she has been talking too long, but she was so painfully anxious to see you—we could not refuse her."

The trained nurse came forward, and as Mrs. Rattray dropped the curtain before the door of the sick-room, she looked up at Gascoigne interrogatively.

"She wanted you to promise something," she said.

"Yes; if she should die, I am going to take charge of Angel."

The lady's face expressed the blankest amazement.

"You," she repeated—"you. Why, you are only a boy yourself."

"I am six-and-twenty, and seventeen years older than the child—a pretty good start."

"Yes, now; but not much of a start when she grows up—and girls grow up so fast, once they enter their teens."

"At present Angel is in single figures," he rejoined, "and small for her age—I think I shall be able to look after her."

"Well, I must say you are very generous," exclaimed Mrs. Rattray, "and I'm sure you have set poor Lena's mind at rest. I admire you—no, you need not blush—for your Quixotism, but I think you have undertaken a thankless and a dangerous task."

With these words Mrs. Rattray once more raised the purdah and disappeared. In the drawing-room Gascoigne found Angel all alone; her eyes looked dim; they had great purple marks round them, the result of weeping and wakefulness. Her wan little face seemed smaller than ever, but it was calm and tearless."

She stood for a moment gazing intently at her cousin, and nursing her elbows, a favourite attitude. At last she said:

"Cousin Philip, do you think she is going to die?" Her face convulsed as she asked the question, but she went on, "Answer me as if I were grown up."

"I hope not," he replied; "your mother is very ill still, but a shade better than she was yesterday. We will hope for the best. Would you care to come out with me for a little turn?"

But Angel shook her head impatiently, and darted away out of sight.

* * * * *

That same evening Mrs. Wilkinson gave Mrs. Rattray full elaborate directions respecting her funeral, and the children's mourning, no black except sashes—they had ribbon of the exact width at Narainswamy's—she hated the idea of a shroud, and desired to be buried in a white dress, "*the* white dress," she added, "since in it I caught my death."

All these injunctions, delivered in a low voice and quiet, every-day manner, were a severe ordeal for her friend. Presently, when Colonel Wilkinson came in to say good-night, he was bidden a solemn good-bye. He was much startled, agitated, and shaken, and broke down completely. Then her mother sent for Angel, who ran in in stockinged feet, climbed on the bed, and threw her arms tightly about her, as if she would never release her again.

"Oh, my own poor baby," murmured the sick woman, "I am going—to leave you."

"No, mummy," she returned breathlessly; "no, no, never!"

"I can only talk to you a little, darling, and you must listen to every word I say," urged her mother in a whisper. "Philip will take care of you—I have given you to him. He has promised to send you to England and have you educated. Never forget how generous this is—always obey him and be good. I have promised for you—I want you to be so happy."

"And oh, mummy, I only want to go with you!" was the answer in a smothered voice.

"You will try and overcome your faults, darling—and be good for my sake—won't you?"

"I'll be good—I'll be anything," she wailed, "only

don't leave me! Oh, mummy, mummy!" and the child clung tightly to the dying woman, and broke into hard, dry sobs.

"Very well, darling, you shall stay," and her mother put her arm round her as she spoke; "no one shall separate us—yet."

Colonel Wilkinson was much disturbed and incensed when he heard that, whilst he had been dismissed with a few hurried sentences, Angel had been suffered to pass the night on her mother's bed.

Worn out with watching and grief, the little creature had fallen into the deep sleep of utter exhaustion, and was barely conscious as Mrs. Rat-tray took her in her arms and carried her away.

When the fierce May sun rose and glared down into the corner bungalow, Angela's mother still slumbered—but hers was the sleep of death.

CHAPTER X

A CHALLENGE

THUS ended the butterfly career of pretty Lena Wilkinson, who looked surprisingly fair and girlish, as she lay with her hands crossed on her heart, surrounded by white flowers. She had passed at dawn; sunset witnessed her interment, and a considerable company—in fact, the whole station—followed the coffin, which was covered with pale blue and silver, by the dead woman's particular desire. The ground in the arid cemetery was almost as hard as rock, and the *cortège* was compelled to halt for a time, whilst the grave was made ready and enlarged. What a depressing scene for a newly-arrived exile! The brick-coloured ground, weather-stained headstones, haggard clergyman, and wan-faced assembly—the gay and glittering coffin waiting till inhospitable alien soil was prepared to receive it. Over all was the stare of a triumphant red sun, sinking slowly into the arms of a tropical night.

At last the service was concluded, and whilst the earth was noisily flung upon the blue and silver coffin and the mourners were dispersing, the station cynic, as he walked towards the gate, pronounced the epitaph of the deceased:

“Poor Mrs. Wilkinson, she was like some delicate flower without perfume, and as she never did anything bad, she will soon be forgotten.”

A few days after the funeral Colonel Wilkinson

was faintly surprised to receive a visit from Philip Gascoigne. After one or two commonplace remarks, the latter explained his errand.

"I came to speak to you about Angel," he said. "I do not know if Lena told you that I am to take charge of her."

"By Jove! No, not a word," rejoined the widower, and his eyes glistened. "Man alive, you don't mean that you are in *earnest*?"

"Yes," assented his visitor; "I propose to educate her, and as soon as I can find a school and a traveling companion, to send her to England."

"Uncommonly handsome of you, I must say," exclaimed her stepfather. "It will cost you a couple of hundred a year."

"Then you are satisfied that I relieve you of the child?" continued Gascoigne, ignoring the money question.

"Satisfied," repeated his host; "satisfied, my dear fellow, is not the word that expresses my feelings—devoutly thankful—happy—enchanted—is more like it. My poor wife and I never agreed about the child. I may say that she was the only subject on which we ever disagreed. From my point of view she is a headstrong, malicious little devil, who cannot be trusted her own length—you never know what mine she will explode on you! My poor Lena held another opinion, and believed her to be 'a little saint.' "

"Perhaps she is something between the two extremes," suggested her cousin drily.

His companion's answer was a doubtful grunt, as he paced the room tugging at his moustache. "I've

been making plans," he resumed, now pointing to a table littered with letters and officials; "I've decided to chuck the service. This has been a great blow, and sickened me with India. How can I soldier, and lug a family about with me? I shall go and settle on my own property in New Zealand. Of course, I am bound to marry again—this seems a heartless thing to say, and Lena only dead a week, but what am I to do with all the children? It is a necessity from a common-sense point of view—a housekeeper and a governess would entail no end of bother and er—er——"

"Expense," suggested his companion sarcastically.

"Expense! Just so," seizing the word, "and I've been wondering what I'm to do with Angel, badgering my brains with all sorts of schemes, when in you walk and take her off my hands. It seems almost like a miracle—the interposition of Providence," he added piously; "and now I understand why Lena was so anxious to see you."

"Yes; it was to talk about Angel, and tell me her wishes respecting her."

"And what were they?"

"That I was to be her guardian, and have absolute control over the child," replied the young man. "I intend to educate and provide for her. Oh yes, by the way, her mother wished her to have all her jewellery."

"All her jewellery!" repeated Colonel Wilkinson. "Oh, I don't know about that! I believe it is my property in the eye of the law—there was no will, you see."

"But you have no girls, and at least you will

scarcely care to keep what Angel's father gave her mother?"

"I suppose you mean the diamond ring?" stammered Colonel Wilkinson, a little cowed by the young man's manner. "Well, I'll think it over; but look here, Gascoigne, I'm a firm believer in pen and ink; would you mind writing me a letter, a formal letter, to say that you propose to relieve me from all charges or responsibilities connected with Angela Gascoigne?"

"Certainly, with pleasure; and on your side, I shall expect you to hand me over any jewellery that belonged to her mother—at least, before she became your wife."

"Um," grunted Colonel Wilkinson, "that ring is rather a big thing. I've had it valued, and it's worth a hundred pounds." He took another turn to the end of the room and back, then he halted in front of his visitor and said, ungraciously, "Well, it's a bargain—you can have the ring, and all the bangles, too; it's a cheap exchange for your written agreement to rid me of a plague."

Philip Gascoigne experienced a most disagreeable sensation; he felt precisely as if he had just purchased the child for a hundred pounds. He instantly rose to end the interview, and said, "I will send you the document as soon as I go home."

"And when will you be prepared to take over charge?" inquired the anxious stepfather.

"Whenever I can make arrangements for her passage."

"And mourning," supplemented the other sharply; "you will provide mourning, of course?"

"Yes; Mrs. Rattray will perhaps undertake her outfit for me. There is a good deal to be done—we must wait until after the monsoon has broken; but I think I can promise you that in six weeks you will have seen the last of Angela."

"Thank God!" was the fervent rejoinder; "that will suit me down to the ground. I won't be moving until the cold weather, not for several months. I say, you won't forget the document, like a good fellow? Oh, must you go? I say, have a lime and soda? No, by the way, we are out of soda-water. Well, then, good-bye—I've a heap of business to get through—you know your way out? Ta, ta."

As the visitor was about to cross the verandah a little figure issued from a side door, and sprang on him and seized his arm in her grasp. "I've been waiting for you for ages, Phil. Why did you stay with him so long?"

"I've been telling Colonel Wilkinson that you are to be my charge, Angel," responded her cousin, "and that in a few weeks' time I hope to send you to England."

"And how much are you to pay?" she demanded bluntly.

"Pay," repeated the young man; "why should I pay anything?"

"Because he never gives without something in exchange." Angel had a bad opinion of her fellow-creatures, and a piercing eye for a hidden motive. "What do you think Ayah Anima is doing now by his orders?"

"She gave them some broth without any bread,
She whipped them——"

"No," interrupting the quotation with angry emphasis, "but selling all my mummy's pretty frocks and hats in the patchery and bazaar! She is taking them round among the soldiers' wives in barracks, *now*."

Gascoigne made no comment on this pitiful illustration of Colonel Wilkinson's thrift; in his mind's eye, he already beheld various reproductions of Mrs. Wilkinson at band and race meeting.

He diplomatically opened a fresh subject by asking, "How will you like to go to England, Angel?"

"Oh, I shall be glad to get away from hateful Ramghur," she answered, "but dreadfully sorry to leave you. I've no one but you now—have I, Phil?"

"Oh, you'll make heaps of friends when you get home," was his evasive reply.

"Who is to take me to England?" she asked sharply.

"I'm not certain," he replied, "and I've not had time to make inquiries, but perhaps Mrs. Dawson."

"Mrs. Dawson," she echoed with an odd, elfish laugh; "she does not like me—lots of people don't like me, cousin Phil," and she looked at him wistfully—such a frail, friendless little creature, his heart was filled with pity as he answered:

"I like you, Angel—that is something to begin with? Would you care to come over and have tea with us this afternoon at four o'clock?"

"Oh yes, yes!" dancing up and down as she gleefully accepted; "and may I pour it out?"

"You may, if we can raise a small teapct. Now there's the bell; run away to your dinner."

A proud, not to say puffed-up, child was that

which ran across to the big bungalow in a newly starched frock and wide black sash. In the verandah Angel found the two young men, who welcomed her cordially, and made her sit between them and pour out tea. And what a pouring out it was; what a slopping of milk it entailed, a dropping of the lid of the teapot into the sugar-basin, and a spoon into the hot water! Hosts and guest made tea and made merry together. There was a cake, too, in which "the three" evinced a profound interest, and Angel chattered incessantly to them and to her companions. Her satisfaction was complete when she was conducted all over the premises and into the stables, where Sally Lunn condescended to eat a piece of sugar-cane from her hand. This visit was the precursor of many. Angel was accorded the freedom of the bungalow, and spent many happy hours within its walls, looking at pictures, making tea, or mending gloves for her bachelor hosts.

Discipline at home was considerably relaxed. Colonel Wilkinson was feverishly busy making ready for his move, and Great Sale, getting old furniture re-covered, glued up, and varnished. Already the catalogue was in the printer's hands, and the adjectives "splendid," "unique," "handsome," and "magnificent" were in extraordinary prominence.

Thanks to the preparations, which were going forward, Angel was spared to her neighbours for many an afternoon. She was not a tiresome child, as Shafto freely admitted; she was noiseless, the dogs liked her, the bearer tolerated her, and when Gascoigne was absent she was content to curl herself up in a chair with a book or a stocking.

Whenever he could afford time her cousin treated her to a drive; but in these, the last days of a truly fearful hot season, driving had ceased to be a joy. All the world was waiting for the rains, and gazing with strained expectation at the great bank of black clouds to the westward, on which the sheet lightning danced every night in dazzling diagrams. This cloud-bank coming nearer, oh, so slowly! embodied the longed-for rains.

For advice and guidance respecting his new charge, her cousin repaired to Mrs. Rattray. Mrs. Rattray had been Mrs. Wilkinson's friend, and she was a kind-hearted, practical woman. There were other ladies who would gladly have advised the inexperienced young guardian, but he did not believe in a multitude of counsellors.

Mrs. Gordon was charming, but she was too young—a mere girl herself! Mrs. Dawson did not care for children, and was alarmingly stiff and formal; so when it was possible he snatched half-an-hour in order to confer with Mrs. Rattray over letters and telegrams, and matters connected with Angel's passage, outfit, and destination.

Late one afternoon he called on this lady by appointment. Angel was with him when he drove up to the Rattrays' neat bungalow, which stood back from the road in a small enclosure, full of pretty shrubs and flowering trees. It had two gates, both opening into the principal thoroughfare in Ramghur.

"I'm going in here, Angel," announced her cousin. "I won't be more than ten minutes, and you can wait in the cart."

"All right," she assented, but tendering two eager hands; "may I hold the reins?"

"Very well; but only for show, mind," he said as he relinquished them. "Promise me you won't attempt to drive."

"Yes, I'll promise," she assented reluctantly, for she had entertained a glorious vision of trotting out at one gate, and whirling in at the other.

With a brief order to the syce to remain at Sally's head, Gascoigne went indoors. He had come to decide finally the choice of school for Angel.

Mrs. Rattray could hardly restrain a smile, as she sat *vis-à-vis* to this good-looking young bachelor, who, with his elbows on the table and his hands in his hair, was anxiously comparing two prospectuses. It was really astonishing how soon he had accommodated himself to his novel situation.

"I must say it is very good of you to adopt——"

"Don't!" he protested, raising his hand. "Please, Mrs. Rattray—every second person I meet tells me the same thing—it is not."

"Very well," she interrupted; "then I will tell you something you have not heard yet. I think you are rashly adventurous."

"I don't see that at all," he replied.

"You will find that Angela requires a strong hand—she is not the least like any child I've ever known. I've not known many intimately—it is true. She will soon pick up an education at home, for she is quick and bright; but she has another education to forget, the education she has acquired out here from servants."

"Oh, she's bound to forget that," said her cousin.

"Is she?" rejoined the lady doubtfully; "I hope so. Now I wonder if you even faintly realise what you have undertaken?"

"I am not sure that I have come down to the bed-rock of my responsibilities—but I will do my best."

"Of course, I know that," said the lady. "But pray bear in mind that it is not a stray pony or a lost dog to whom you are playing Providence. You have assumed the charge of a human life, a child with a strange nature, and who will be an extraordinary woman some day."

"Yes; but at present the woman, thank Heaven, is in the far-away future, and I have only to do with a child."

"I hope Angel will never give you reason to regret your generosity."

"I'm sure she will be all right. You make far too much of the business. I'm only sending my poor cousin's little orphan to school. She will turn out well, if she falls into good hands," and here he held up several letters and said: "It is for you to choose to whose keeping I entrust her."

In the meantime the subject of this conversation sat in the cart outside, enormously impressed by the importance of her position. To other children who passed the gate she nodded with an air of splendid condescension; they stared and stared and looked back enviously at the little Gascoigne girl all alone in a dogcart, holding the reins. Truly, these were some of Angela's proudest moments.

But one acquaintance, a bare-legged, freckled boy, in a striped cotton suit, boldly walked up the drive between the shrubs, and proceeded to interview little

Gascoigne. This intruder was Toady Dodd, a youth of eight, son of an impecunious house, and Angel's mortal enemy.

"Hullo!" he shouted, standing with hands in pockets and legs wide apart; "what a swell we are, cocked up there!"

"Yes—miles up above you," she retorted sharply; "run away and steal some more macaroons," a malicious reminder of some past evil deed.

"Are you going to drive?" he inquired, calmly ignoring the rude suggestion, "or are you just there for show?"

Angel gave a brief nod.

"*What* a show!" cried Toady, cutting a caper, and making a series of hideous grimaces. Angel now leant over and lifted the whip out of its socket, and began to handle it significantly.

"You're afraid to drive, ain't you?" he screamed. No reply; his adversary was far too proud to record her promise.

"Drive out of the gate and back," urged the tempter, "and I'll never say you're a coward again."

"I'm not a coward, you ugly, freckled toad," she screamed. "If you don't mind, I shall hit you with the whip."

"First catch me," he shouted derisively, executing a war dance just out of reach. Come now—I dare you—dare you—to hit the horse."

To touch Sally with the whip was not driving, argued the child with herself; and consumed by a feminine desire to show off, and exasperated by her tormentor, with a force really intended for *him*, she

brought the lash suddenly down on Sally's shining flank.

Instantly there was a vicious bang against the splash-board; Angel felt herself shot into the air, and remembered no more. The shrieks of Toady, the yells of the syce, and the sound of thundering hoofs summoned Gascoigne to the steps. There he saw the syce picking himself up with great care, he saw a white bunch and two black legs in the middle of a croton bush, he saw a great cloud of dust flying down the road—and that was all! He ran to the shrub and disentangled Angel, who had gone in head foremost and was merely stunned and speechless. The servant, however, found his tongue, when he discovered that his injuries were not mortal.

"Missy Baba—beating with whip—horse done gone!"

Such was his brief explanation.

Meanwhile the real cause of all the mischief lurked under a great creeper, and remained a palpitating spectator of the scene. As soon as Angel had recovered her senses she began to exculpate herself in sobbing gasps, "Oh, Philip, I didn't drive—I did *not* drive. I only touched Sally with the whip." And she burst into a storm of tears, whilst the syce ran limping out, in order to raise the station and catch the runaway.

* * * * *

It was in a second-class "fitton" that Angel returned home. A fitton is a ramshackle phaeton, drawn by a pair of bony ponies, and a second-class fitton is precisely what it claims to be. From this lowly equipage the delinquent was delivered over to

her ayah, who awaited her on the verandah with stolid dignity.

"And the dogcart and big horse," she cried, "what hath befallen them?" But Miss Gascoigne merely shrugged her shoulders and stalked off into her own apartment. Her cousin did not escape so easily; he had dismissed the conveyance, and was proceeding on foot, when he encountered his chum.

"I say, where are Sally and the trap?" asked Shafto.

"I've no notion," he answered; "in Jericho, for all I know."

"But," pulling up, "I say—bar jokes."

"Oh, yes, I bar jokes," agreed Gascoigne; "I left Angel holding the reins when I was in at the Rat-trays'. I heard a scrimmage, and when I ran out Angel was in the bush, the syce on his back, and Sally was nowhere. I believe the child touched her with the whip—at any rate, she went through the station like greased lightning."

"Great Scotland!" ejaculated his friend, "and with the cart at her heels—a mare that is worth a thousand rupees, and the trap new from Dykes' last season. So much for Angel! Has she broken her neck?"

"No, but she is breaking her heart, poor little soul."

"Odious little beast, she has no heart to break—that's where you make a mistake. Where are you off to?"

"To send out all the syces in the place to chase Sally—she went towards the railway."

"Oh, I'll run her down; but, mind you, Phil, next

time you see her she'll have broken knees," and with this agreeable prophecy he galloped away. There was no sign of Sally all that night, but various rumours respecting her were afloat in the Club. One lady had seen a ghostly horse and trap dash up at her door at dark, and when a servant ran to the steps the horse had wheeled sharp round, plunged through a low hedge, cart and all, and vanished.

Later, an empty vehicle and a galloping steed had been viewed beyond the jail. At eight o'clock the next morning the syce reappeared with a quadruped said to be the runaway animal, coated from head to tail with sweat and red dust; her very eyes were half closed. Who could believe that this dirty, demoralised, limping creature was smart Sally Lunn? Yet it was Sally, and, marvellous to relate, her knees were unblemished. She had been captured five miles out in the open country on her back in a dry nullah, with the trap under her. The shattered remains of the vehicle followed soberly on the Ryot's bullock cart—it was minus a wheel, a shaft, also mats, lamps, cushions, but these were subsequently collected in various parts of the cantonment—and their owner came to the conclusion that he had got out of the business far better than he expected. Sally was terribly nervous and wild for weeks; the cart was despatched to Lucknow to be repaired—and there were no more drives for Angel.

CHAPTER XI

WHO IS SHE?

THE monsoon had broken at last, and the rain descended and the floods came in drenching sheets. Red plains sprang to life, and became a delicate green, frogs croaked hilariously, snakes were washed out of their holes, sickly vegetation revived as if touched by some magician's wand, and all the oleanders were in flower.

During the long, wet days, when nullahs were racing torrents and the avenue a running stream—a joy to the ducks—Angel was constantly to be found at the big bungalow, playing the *rôle* of *enfant de la maison*. She was permitted to wander through the empty rooms, and to amuse herself to her heart's content. Her guardian was a good deal from home; since the first burst of the rains had sorely tried the piers of the new bridge over the Ram Gunga, every morning at an early hour he wrapped himself in a mackintosh and leggings, mounted his horse, and splashed away. Even in the afternoons Shafto and Angel frequently had the premises to themselves; the former took but scant notice of his companion, for ever since the "Sally episode" she had been unpardoned and in his black books.

One afternoon he was enjoying a lazy spell, a sporting paper and a cheroot, in the verandah; the "Imp," as he mentally called her, was presumably

amusing herself in the interior with the dogs or the bearer's little girl—or both. He had, in fact, forgotten her existence, and was absorbed in the weights for the Leger, when three cold, moist fingers were laid on his cheek, and between his eyes and the printed page was thrust a large photograph.

Naturally he started, exclaimed, and stared. Then he became conscious that he was looking at the charming picture of a beautiful girl of nineteen, with glorious eyes and a faint but bewitching smile. Shafto, the ever-susceptible, seized the portrait in both hands and examined it exhaustively. It had something to say for itself, too; across one corner was inscribed, in a dashing caligraphy, the name "Lola." He continued to study the face with a puzzled air, then turned and stared at the child interrogatively.

Was this one of her mother's friends? To the best of his recollection, he had never seen the face in Mrs. Wilkinson's drawing-room.

"Do you think she is pretty?" inquired Angel eagerly, as she met his glance.

"Ra—ther," was his emphatic reply. "But who is she?—where the dickens did you unearth her?"

"In Philip's room," was the unexpected response. "Oh, you need not look so shocked, Mr. Billy Shafto," she cried audaciously; "I've not stolen it! I was only searching for some paper to draw on—he generally has lots—and I opened his shabby old leather box and found some. Two lovely bits of cardboard, and in the middle—between them—this. Who is she, do you know? Do you think—he is in love with her?" she asked anxiously.

"I'll tell you what I do think," said Shafto, suddenly sitting erect, "I think you ought to be well whipped."

Angel's pale face became pink to the roots of her hair.

"How dare you go and pry among Mr. Gascoigne's papers," he resumed, "you infernal little monkey? You are a horrid, sneaking, sly little imp."

"But what have I done?" she protested in a shrill key. "I was only looking for something to draw on—and why shouldn't he have *one* lady, when you have eleven in your room? Yes, all in frames, and two of Mrs. Giddy on your writing-table."

This was carrying the war into the enemy's camp with a vengeance! For a moment her companion, who was now at boiling-point, struggled desperately for composure and speech. At last he said with an effort:

"You just march back at once and put that photograph where you found it."

As he spoke he drew the silver paper carefully over the face, as if he would hide Philip's sweetheart from the elf's prying eyes. Angel snatched it out of his hand with a jerk, and walked away without one word; but she deliberately studied the photograph till she learnt the face by heart. She learnt something more also, for as she replaced it, on its original wrapping she read on the paper in the same bold scrawl, "To Phil—with Lola's love."

So that was Philip's secret, thought Shafto; that was Philip's lady-love, who, by all accounts, had chucked him. She had a lovely face, a haunting face; what bad luck for poor old Phil!—and that

meddlesome imp had discovered his hidden skeleton, had dragged it forth into daylight, and possibly exhibited it all round the servants' quarters, and finally come to him and asked in her little fluting voice, "*Who is she?*"

And here came Phil at last, in dripping condition on a dripping horse—what a pair of drowned rats!

As soon as he had changed his clothes Gascoigne appeared in the verandah, looked about, and said:

"Hullo, where is Angel? I thought she was coming over to make tea?"

"Oh, she has been here all right enough," rejoined his comrade grimly; "very much here. I believe she has departed. I saw her flying across the compound just now. Phil, that child, instead of making tea, has been making hay in your room."

"Oh, has she?" he responded carelessly, as he lit a cheroot. "Well, she can't do much harm there."

"I'm not so sure of that," retorted Shafto with tragic significance. "She found the photograph of one of the prettiest girls I've ever seen, and brought it out for information—awfully keen to know all about it."

Gascoigne jumped up suddenly, and took the cigar out of his mouth. His face was stern as he looked fixedly at his friend.

"Billy, this is some of your chaff."

"I swear it's not," protested Shafto forcibly. "That prying imp was rooting in your despatch box. Ah!" he concluded in a significant undertone, as Gascoigne hurriedly left him.

After a short absence his friend returned, and resumed his seat without one word.

"I made her put it back," continued his companion. "I always knew that you'd be let in by that child, somehow."

"No," rejoined the other; "I let myself in—as you call it."

"You can't deny that she has made a rather brilliant beginning. Smashing up a new dogcart, unearthing your most sacred possession, and flaunting it round the house. What on earth are you going to do with her?"

"I'm going to send her to school next week."

"And afterwards?"

"She will make her home with some nice family."

"Nice prospect for the nice family," remarked Shafto. "And after she has quite done with the nice family?"

"That is far enough ahead," replied Gascoigne with a touch of impatience. "Angel won't be grown up for years, and we may all be dead by that time."

"Now, I call that a really cheerful way of looking at it. One thing is certain, whoever is dead, Angel won't weep. She has no more heart than a paving-stone."

"Why do you say that?" demanded her cousin quickly.

"Simply because it is patent to all the world that she has forgotten her mother already. She never mentions her name——"

"That does not matter—that is no sign," argued her champion; "she thinks more of her mother than the whole Wilkinson family put together. The other morning, when there was a break in the rains and I was out early, I saw a small figure staggering

over towards the cemetery, carrying a pot as large as herself. I kept behind, of course, and did not let her see me; it was Angel, taking a plant to her mother's grave. There's no stone up yet."

"No, nor ever will be," supplemented Shafto.

"The cemetery is more than a mile away," continued Gascoigne; "so you will allow that it was rather a big job for a child of her age."

"Oh, yes," admitted her implacable adversary; "Angel's jobs are generally on a large scale."

"She steals off every morning almost before light," resumed her defender.

"What is the ayah about, to allow her to prowl at such an hour?"

"Oh, the ayah allows her to go her own way now; she can't control her," confessed her cousin.

"No, nor anyone else," muttered Shafto. "Look here," he added suddenly, "I'll tell you something, Phil. That child is going to be a beauty."

"Nonsense—not she. You are mad about beauty, rejoined his friend contemptuously.

"Yes, she is, and something out of the ordinary, too, if I am any judge. This, I imagine, will complicate matters. Oh, my poor old boy, I wouldn't be in *your* shoes for a thousand pounds!"

CHAPTER XII

ANGEL IMPARTS A SECRET

It was the evening before Angel's departure for England. Her luggage was carefully labelled, her roll of wraps was strapped, all arrangements were complete. She was to travel under the neatly trimmed wing of Mrs. Dawson, leaving Ramghur at dawn. Gascoigne had intended accompanying his charge to Bombay, but duty could not spare him—no, not even to escort her to the railway station; he had just received an urgent telegram which called him away that night, and had walked over to take leave of Angel, followed by the three. They were all pacing up and down Colonel Wilkinson's desolate verandah, the man and child side by side, the dogs in close attendance. It was a cool evening in the rains, and the sun had recently set in a blaze of dramatic magnificence.

"Now, Angel," said the young man after a short silence, "you are going to be a credit to me, I know."

"Yes, I am," she answered with superb self-confidence; "I'll do anything you like, only tell me what I am to do."

"Think three times before you speak," he suggested.

"Oh, I shall hate that," she rejoined with a shrug.

"But you know you often blurt out things that you really don't mean, and that get you into trouble."

"Um—yes," she admitted with a pout, "and what else?"

"Never be afraid to speak the truth."

"I'm not—not a little bit," she proclaimed.

"Mind you stick to that—it's more than most of your elders can say. You will write to me every week, and let me know how you get on?"

"Yes; and you will answer my letters—they will be the only ones I shall get."

"You may be sure I shall write, and the dogs, too; they shall send you their photographs."

"Oh, Philip," she exclaimed, "how I wish you were coming home before two long years! I shall mark off the weeks till I see you, beginning to-morrow; and I'll save up every single one of my secrets to tell you."

"I don't think they will give you much trouble."

"Oh, won't they? I know quantities of secrets. Shall I tell you one now?"

"Yes, if you like," he rejoined indifferently, "as long as it is your own property; I don't want to listen to other people's affairs."

"But this one is my own, my very own—Philip. You must promise me not to tell anyone *ever*."

"How solemn and important you look!" he laughed; "what can this mighty secret be? Yes, I see you are panting to tell me—I promise. Now for it."

"Then listen," she began mysteriously, "no—first come inside," and she beckoned him to follow her into the drawing-room; then she ran to the different half-doors and peeped furtively around, whilst her cousin waited to hear the important disclosure with

an expression of amused toleration. What a little actress she was, darting about from door to door! At last she came up to him, looked him straight in the face, folded her hands, and said in a voice that quivered with triumph:

"It was *I*—who cut up Mrs. Dawson's dresses."

"What do you say?" gasped her companion, staring incredulously into the small white face.

"She wouldn't let me go home with her, if she knew, would she?" and Angel cracked the joints of all her fingers, native style, as if she were letting off a succession of squibs.

"You are not in earnest, Angel?—not about the dresses?" he expostulated, with bated breath.

"But I am," she retorted sharply; "she never asked mother to see them—and mother cried. So I just took the *dirzee's* scissors and ran out in the dusk," illustrating the action with her skinny arms, "through your compound; then I crawled into Mrs. Dawson's verandah—I believe the *chokedar* took me for a dog. No one else was watching—I stole into her room and just cut everything to pieces. Oh, my, it was fun—snipping the feathers, tearing the *crêpe*, and hacking away at the satin. You should have seen the room. I was very sorry for the pretty things—but I had to do it, and all quick, quick as lightning, for of course if Mrs. Dawson had caught me she would have killed me. Then I crept out, and got behind a pillar and away into the shadows, through a hole in the wall, and home." She paused breathless with exultation, and her listener, as he scrutinised the small, ruthless countenance, began to realise that his responsibilities were heavier than

he anticipated, and that there was more of the imp than the angel in his little ward.

"Why do you look so queer?" she cried suddenly. "I only did it because I loved my mummy; I would do as much for *you* to-morrow. Why don't you speak?—are you shocked?"

"Yes—I should think I was. I am wondering what your mother would have said to this," he demanded sternly.

"Oh, mummy would have scolded and pretended to be angry," she answered, with an air of serene conviction, "but in her heart all the time she would be *so* glad."

And as she pronounced this opinion, she nursed her elbows and nodded her head reassuringly.

"Well, Angel," said her cousin after a painful silence, "I would not have believed this story from any lips but your own. I can hardly credit what you tell me. I am sorry to find that you are different to what I thought you were, a mischievous, vindictive, cunning child."

For an instant the little culprit looked stunned, as if she could not believe her ears.

"Oh, Phil!" she cried in a voice of intense anguish. "Don't say it—I'm not—I'm not—and I'm going away to-morrow, and you are angry with me. Oh, what shall I do, what shall I do?"

And she wrung her tiny hands in a wild frenzy of grief.

"It is certainly time you went home, Angel," he returned steadily, "and if you love me, as you say, I implore you to play no more of these monkey tricks. I hate treacherous, underhand ways. Think of all

the damage you did. You destroyed what must have cost a great deal of money."

"But, Phil, you don't understand," she pleaded, and tears rained down her face; "I did all for mummy, my own mummy, and now"—her voice rising to a wail—"she is dead, and you are angry—oh, what shall I do, what shall I do?"

She flung herself downwards on the sofa in the abandonment of her grief, and buried her head in the cushion.

"Come now, Angel," said her cousin, stooping over her, "don't cry like this—your secret has given me an unexpected shock, and shown me a side of your character that—frightens me—but," as her sobs shook her, "sit up and dry your eyes, little girl. As this is our last evening, I will say no more. You will be good, won't you?" he whispered, stroking her hair.

"Yes, yes, if you will love me," and she raised herself and looked at him with piteous, entreating eyes.

"All right, then," he agreed, "that's a bargain. I will love you if you are good. Hullo, here comes Colonel Wilkinson."

"Oh, then," starting up, "we must say good-bye." Gascoigne sat down beside the child, and was about to stoop and kiss her, when she flung her arms round his neck and pressed her lips to his with the passion of a desolate, forlorn creature who was parting, perhaps for ever, with her only friend.

Her action was the more surprising, since she was a child who recoiled from endearments, and coldly turned away her face when ladies would have

caressed her. As suddenly as she had embraced her cousin, she released and pushed him from her with violence and ran out of the room. Her stepfather, who encountered Angel in the doorway, now advanced, rubbing his hands complacently.

"So she's quite broken down, I see. That's just her one redeeming point—her affection for you. She has no feeling for anyone else. Just fancy, she never expressed the smallest regret at being parted from her dear little brothers, and when the ayah said, 'This is the last time you will ever have tea together,' she tossed her head and said, 'So much the better.' Can you imagine such appalling heartlessness? I tell you candidly, Gascoigne, that you will have your hands full."

"I think not," rejoined her visitor; "not in the sense you mean—I suppose you will be leaving before long?"

"Yes, I'm getting rid of all the big things by degrees," replied the Colonel, "the bullock, bandy, and piano and victoria; I advertised them, and got my price," and as he announced this gratifying fact he seemed to swell with triumph. It was true that he had obtained double their value for his shabby, worn-out possessions, and had administered severe disappointments to various harmless and deluded people; in whose nostrils the very name of Wilkinson stinks until the present day.

"I am sending some refreshments with Angel," he continued with a gust of generosity, "hard-boiled eggs, lemonade, and biscuits. You will see that I get the bottles and basket back from Bombay, won't you—like a good fellow?"

"It will be rather difficult," rejoined the good fellow, wondering if the avaricious wretch, who grudged the value of a few annas, would also require the egg-shells. "But I'll see what can be done." After a few words respecting luggage, labels, tickets, and, above all, an early start, the men parted. Gascoigne strolled back to his quarters, a prey to some anxious thoughts. What passion was embodied in the child's puny embrace, and was it to be, as Shafto predicted, a millstone about his neck as long as ever he lived? There was no blinking the fact, that he had accepted a serious charge. Angel was totally apart from other little girls of her age who cared for chocolates and dolls. She was only interested in human puppets, in the serious things of life, her feelings and emotions far transcended her years. She was a child in a thousand, for good or evil. Clever, resolute, unscrupulous, secret, yes, she was all that, but she was also devoted, unselfish, and faithful.

Her future would be a matter of profound anxiety; fortunately the thread of her fate lay in no hand save his own.

CHAPTER XIII

ANGEL'S WINGS ARE CLIPPED

LADY AUGUSTA GASCOIGNE was the daughter of a marquis, the widow of a baronet, and our little Angel's grandmamma. She lived in a small house in Hill Street, with her daughter Eva, a plain, awkward, distressingly shy woman of seven-and-thirty, who remained on her parents' hands as a hopelessly unmarketable article, when her two younger sisters had made brilliant matches, and covered their chaperon with glory. But Eva's sole suitor was an ineligible, who had been dismissed with indignation and contumely, and as Miss Gascoigne disliked society and dress, she had subsided into genteel obscurity—her mother's housekeeper and drudge.

Lady Augusta was blessed with an iron constitution and the vigor of perpetual youth; with her slender figure, well-poised head, and active movements, she appeared at a little distance to be about thirty, albeit the remorseless Peerage stated her years to be three-score. She wore her clothes with grace, employed a French maid—well versed in “the art of beauty”—and got all her gowns in Paris. She patronized the turf, the theatre, and the most popular foreign Spas; her supper and roulette parties were renowned. She carried on her correspondence by telegram, and lived in a perpetual whirl. Her ladyship still retained the remains of considerable beauty; her nose was delicately chiselled (and came

out well in her photographs) ; her eyes were blue, very quick, and rather closely set together ; her hair, which had once been red, had faded to a pale sandy shade, and was marvellously crimped and curled—and matched. She was exceedingly vivacious, cheery, and popular, always well-dressed, always well posted in the earliest news, the newest story, and the coming scandal, and men thronged around Lady Augusta like flies about a pot of honey. She was constantly in evidence ; her comings and goings, her little dinners and race parties were faithfully recorded. She was smart, her friends were smart, her turn-out was smart, and when she appeared at church parade “wearing her sables,” or at the opera “wearing her diamonds,” or merely driving down Sloane Street with “a bunch of violets tucked into her coat,” were not all these doings chronicled in the Society papers ?

Lady Augusta was thoroughly satisfied with her surroundings and herself, and put all painful thoughts, such as the memory of her two dead sons, far from her. She was entirely without heart or sympathy, and turned her back on sickness, suffering, and all disagreeables. She was quick to seize on, and enjoy, every passing pleasure, and declared herself a philosopher—but people who disapproved of this callous and volatile lady called her by another name.

Immediately after the death of Mrs. Wilkinson, Philip Gascoigne wrote to Lady Augusta, and informed her that he had undertaken the charge of her granddaughter, and if not actually requiring her sanction, at any rate deferring to her opinion, and

asking advice respecting the child's education. To this announcement, Angel's grandmamma replied by the following mail, declaring that she had hitherto been under the impression that Tony's child had *died* in infancy, and that whilst she warmly applauded Philip's benevolence, she failed to feel the faintest interest in the offspring of the late Mrs. Wilkinson, and that any authority that might be supposed to lie with her, she transferred to him with all her heart. Her ladyship went on to say that he was a bold man to saddle himself with a girl of nine; born and brought up in India, and that his wisest course would be to send her to some cheap hill school, or convent out there, when, later on, she could become a governess or a nun. When was he coming home, and when was he going to marry? With a few items of society gossip, the letter was concluded by his affectionate Aunt Augusta. A more cool and heartless epistle the recipient had never perused. As soon as he had mastered its contents, he tore it into little pieces across and across, and tossed it into the paper basket—even Colonel Wilkinson was not more anxious to repudiate the child than her own grandmother.

By this time the friendless little waif had arrived in England safely, and one of her early letters will best describe her impressions. It was written over three sheets of foreign paper, with much underlining, scratching out, and bad spelling.

“TENTERDEN HOUSE, WIMBLEDON.

“MY DEAR PHIL,—I sent you one letter from Suez, and I now write this from school which I hate,

and every moment I wish I was back in your verandah playing with the dogs, and mending your soks. This is a half-holiday and instead of going to the hokky I am scribbling to you. I have so much to tell you. First of all about Mrs. Dawson, she was middling kind to me on borde ship but I ran all messages and sowed buttons on her boots, and brought her brandy when she was very sick. All the time I was making up my mind to *tell her* about the dresses, I hated to have to do it, but I felt that she ought to know and not have to wonder all her life. So one day when she was awfully ill and week, lying back with her eyes shut, some voice inside my head said *Do it now*, now is the time, she cannot beet you. And I said, Mrs. Dawson I am going to make your mind easy, it was I who cut up all your dresses. I am very sorry, they were beautiful, and if I could give them back now I would. I've nothing to give you to make up with, but my gold bangell, the only nice thing that I have cousin Phil, and that you gave me; so I took it off, and offered it to her. She had opened her eyes ever so wide, and at first looked quite stupid and queer; then she got very red and fierce and wriggled up and panted for breath. At last she said only you are a little orfan I don't know what I would do with you, land you at Malta I believe. There's your bangell and she flung it out of the port hole, and said now tell me you little feend what you did it for. And I told her the truth that it was to punish her for her unkindness to my mummy, and this made her quite crazy. She jumped up, and took me by the shoulders and turned me out of the cabbिन. She never speekes to me now, but she

has told everyone, and no one ever talks to me, and one child said go away you little cat my mama says I am not to allow you to come near me you ought to be in Jale. So I did not gain much by telling the truth that time you see. I lost all my friends and my dear dear bangell. This school is a big red house with long passages and great bair rooms and a bell rings for everything, getting up prayers lessons play. Oh I do hate that bell. There are forty girls and I am not the youngest only the smallest in the lowest class. Miss Morton thinks me dreadfully bakward, and so I am, except in sowing, but she was surprised to hear that I had read Vanity Fair and Byron's pomes and could say Shelly's skylark by hart. The other girls are very prim, some tell lies as bad as Anima any day, some are greedy, as greedy as Pinky, some are very nice, but they all think me odd and wild. I like to make them stair, so I jabber Hindustani and crack my finger-joints. I have no friends here except the second housemaid the cat and the drill serjant. He says I am made of yres, and he has been in India but only in Madras. I have been in lots of skrapes already dear Phil I dont believe I am suitable for skool, I'de much rather have lived with you, and had a pretty young governess like Miss Dove who teeches embroidrey. There are some pretty girls too, they all think me so ugly, but I dont mind. Give each of the dogs a kiss from me and three to Sally just in the middle of her nose, and tell the bearers little girl I have not forgotten her, and tell Toady Dodd I am learning french and german and dancing and am going to be akom—clever, I cant spell the big word, it will vex

him awfully. Be sure you write me long long long letters, you cannot think how I watch the clock on male days. If you forget me, I pray that I may take small pox and dye,—I am every yours truly,

“ANGEL.”

But Angel was not forgotten. Some description of letter found its way into her eager hands, two out of four mail days. Her quivering white face, as the letters were distributed, caused a pang of pity in the hearts of the womenkind who witnessed it. Angel's feelings were ten years in advance of her age and her associates. As weeks and months went on, she began to spread her short wings, and to evince her personality, and was presently notorious as the most idle, clever, mischievous, and unruly girl in the whole school. She could learn, she had unusual capabilities, but she much preferred playing tricks, scribbling poetry, and affording unlimited fun to her class, among whom, thanks to the freshness and audacity of her ideas, she assumed the position of ring-leader and queen. She received punishment with the most staggering *sang-froid*. What was to be done with a child who did not mind being sent to bed, rather liked dry bread than otherwise, and heartily enjoyed her own society? Her example was spreading like an epidemic among the juniors; idleness, daring feats, and flat disobedience were the fashion since the Indian child had introduced them. At last Miss Morton sent for the culprit, and interviewed her in her own sanctum, a room that had witnessed not a few tears and scenes. Miss Morton was a clever, handsome woman of forty, ad-

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mirably fitted for her position. All her girls looked up to her, not a few loved her; her influence bore fruit in many and many a future home.

When the slight fair child in deep mourning was ushered in, and surveyed the room and its occupants with critical blue eyes, she said:

"Little Angela Gascoigne, you may sit down," Angela took a seat, and sedately folded her arms. This action, did Miss Morton but know, portended mortal defiance.

"Angela, you are old and intelligent beyond your years," continued her teacher; "you are not yet ten, but you have seen as much of life as many girls of eighteen."

Angela's eyes complacently admitted the fact.

"I therefore talk to you, as if you were almost grown up," resumed Miss Morton. Angela inclined her head gravely in acknowledgment of the compliment. "I must confess, that although you have read the most advanced literature, your mind is pure and child-like. On the other hand, in your small way, you are an anarchist, you rebel against every law. What do you propose to do with your life? You have influence, you have brains, have you decided to grow up an ill weed, and to do as much harm as you can?"

No reply. Angela gazed at the flowers, the water-colours, the clock, finally into Miss Morton's eyes.

"Angela Gascoigne," she continued, "answer me."

"No," breathed Angel in a quick whisper.

"Very well, then bear in mind that you will have to change your ways; you must work as do other

girls, conform to the school rules. You have been endowed with gifts that are uncommon, and yet you only misuse them, in order to make your companions as idle and reckless as yourself. Unless you undertake to improve, and give me your word that you will show a good example for the future, I shall be obliged to write to your guardian, and ask him to remove you at once."

Angel's face grew pale, her eyes looked black, and tragic.

"I hate school!" she burst out, passionately.

"In that case, you may be sure that school will hate you," was the prompt rejoinder, "and the sooner you leave it the better. But why do you hate school?"

"I don't know."

"What a silly answer for an intelligent girl! Then I can tell you; the reason is, because you are unaccustomed to rules, and regularity; it is a different life to the one you have led. I am aware that you are an orphan. Tell me, dear child," now leaning towards her, "do you love no one in the whole world, not even yourself? Come—won't you speak to me?" she pleaded very low.

"Yes," rejoined the child, straightening her little figure, "I love Philip."

"You mean Mr. Gascoigne, your guardian?"

Angel nodded, and her face worked, despite her precocious self-control.

"Then don't you think he will be very sorry to hear that you refuse to accept any of the advantages he has provided for you? I know that he hopes to see you an accomplished girl, and you can easily

learn if you please. Don't you think it will grieve him when I am compelled to say that I cannot keep you among my pupils—because of your idleness; that with your intensely strong individuality, you influence them for ill, and I am obliged to remove a bad example from among them?"

"Are you going to write—*this*—to Philip?" cried Angel, with a gesture of horror.

"Yes, and at once, unless you will promise me that it is not necessary."

"I will promise anything—to please him."

"Then address yourself to your lessons—begin to-day—put away your foolish impish tricks, Angel," urged her companion; "your success lies in your own hands. Don't you think it will be much better for your guardian to be proud of you than to hear you are expelled?"

"Does that mean sent away in — disgrace?" stammered the child with characteristic directness.

"Yes, but I see that you have made up your mind; and, instead of being a trial to myself and others, you can, and will be, a help. You have some one to please, some one to surprise, some one to whose coming you can look forward—have you not thought of that?"

"Oh, I am always thinking of that," rejoined Angel, impetuously, and, to Miss Morton's amazement, she wept, as she faltered, "I have only Philip in all the world. I would rather die than that he should think—badly of me—I will try, yes, I will work. Oh, I never dreamt of Philip. Tell me what I am to do, and I will do everything to please him

and surprise him when he comes home.—Yes, and I wish to please you too.”

Then Miss Morton took the little rebel in her arms and kissed her tenderly, and Angel quietly submitted to her caress; since her mother died few women had kissed her. From that hour, she won the child's heart.

Tea was brought in, and the teacher and her pupil had a nice, long, comfortable talk about India. Angel gave her companion many fresh views of the natives of Hindustan, and the sun went down upon another of Miss Morton's conquests.

In a short time, the weird-faced, wiry little Anglo-Indian had made extraordinary progress, she worked conscientiously and incessantly—to please Philip.

Her letters were a source of surprise and embarrassment to her guardian, written in a clear, small hand, with unexceptional orthography; they breathed a spirit of passionate attachment, a selfless love, that was inexhaustible.

And what had he to offer in exchange for this dear child's single-hearted devotion? Nothing but a trivial, and lukewarm, affection.

CHAPTER XIV

PHILIP'S LOVE AFFAIR

PHILIP GASCOIGNE, whom this history chiefly concerns, was the only child of a distinguished officer who late in life had prevailed on a beautiful and charming woman to accept his gallant heart and honorable name. General Gascoigne had settled down in a fine old manor house in the heart of Kent, and there turned his sword into a ploughshare, which latter implement, according to his old club comrades, had dug his grave. He died when his boy was nine years of age, having survived sufficiently long to imbue the little fellow with some of his own high ideas of truth and honour, discipline and self-command. Within a short distance of "Earlsmead" Manor was Earlsmead Park, the stately home of the Craven-Hargreaves. Venetia Gascoigne and Mary Hargreaves had been schoolfellows and were close friends, and little Philip grew up almost as one of the Hargreaves family, which consisted of two fine manly boys, and a girl named Lola—a child with a cloud of frizzy bronze hair, and a pair of irresistible dark eyes; she was the youngest of the three, and the spoiled darling of the household. Mr. Craven-Hargreaves was an agreeable, dapper little gentleman, who had been in debt ever since he left Eton, and was existing (and more or less enjoying life) on the forbearance of his creditors. He was rarely at home, save in the shooting season, and the bur-

then of the family cares fell on his wife's graceful shoulders. The boys had to be sent to school, and the *pros* and *cons* connected with this outlay cost their mother many anxious hours. Philip Gascoigne preceded them to Harrow, there being no question of expense regarding his education, for when his father died, honoured and regretted, he left behind him the best traditions of a soldier and a gentleman, he also left an unexpectedly large provision for his family. Philip was three years older than Lola, and had been her bond slave ever since she could walk alone. It was always "Phil and Lola" who were partners in games, forays, excursions, and scrapes. What halcyon days those were, when the eldest of the quartette was but twelve; and everything they entered into was a pure and unalloyed delight, from nutting, and fishing, and cricket, and riding, to play-at robbers and smugglers in the woods, making fires and roasting apples, potatoes—also, sad to relate, blackbirds and thrushes—returning home grubby, weary, and happy, with but scant appetite for schoolroom tea. One day Philip and Lola, who had been despatched on an errand to the village, surprised some boys who were drowning a puppy in a pond. Philip instantly interfered to save it, tore off his jacket and swam to the rescue. Subsequently, all dripping like a water-god, he had fought Bill Lacy, of the "Leg of Mutton Inn," and had thrashed him soundly, whilst Lola stood by with the shivering puppy in her arms, alternately screaming encouragement and defiance. Then when the bruised and bleeding victor turned to her, for his jacket, and his meed of praise, she had rewarded him in her own

impulsive fashion—she kissed him then and there before all the boys in Earlsmead village. It was an unseemly and indecent spectacle in the eyes of Mrs. Grundy (who lived over the Post Office), Miss Craven-Hargreaves, of the Park, acting as backer in a street fight, and awarding as prize her kisses. It was true that she was but eight years of age and her champion eleven, and consequently the misdemeanour was suffered to pass. Some said she was a fine courageous little miss; others, that she was a bold piece, who would come to no good yet, but all agreed that she had plenty of pluck, and would sooner or later marry the General's boy.

* * * * *

When Lola was seventeen—and oh! what a fascinating sweet seventeen—Philip found his tongue, and they became engaged. Contemporary matrons lifted their hands in horror. A lad of twenty, who had only just left Sandhurst! But other far-seeing and less ambitious individuals pointed out that young Gascoigne was a fairly good match, he must succeed to at least a thousand a year, and expectations, whilst the Hargreaves might expect the bailiffs at any moment.

Within the next twelve months Philip lost his mother—whom he worshipped; even Lola had not disturbed her from her niche—and the long impending crash came at the Park. Mr. Hargreaves fled with a portmanteau to the south of France—his plea was health—and left his wife to face the storm alone. The storm developed into a typhoon, a tempest of howling creditors; mortgages were foreclosed, the park was let to graziers, and, as a final

climax, there was a sale—an auction, at the house itself. The family pictures, portraits by Gainsborough, Raeburn, and Romney, went to the highest bidder. The treasured silver and tapestries, as well as carriage and horses, were scattered far and wide. After a storm—a calm—the Hargreaves boys obtained commissions, the Park had found a tenant, Mrs. Hargreaves and Lola went abroad, and Philip Gascoigne, now a full-blown sapper, was despatched to Gibraltar. He and Lola corresponded faithfully. They were to be married when he was four-and-twenty, and already he was collecting rugs, Moorish trays, and old carpets suitable for a lady's drawing-room, when he received a letter from Lola to say that her father was once more in difficulties, *frightful* difficulties; he had been gambling on the Stock Exchange, hoping to recoup his fortune, and had had every penny of his own (as well as other people's pennies) swept away. Philip wired to place all his available funds at Lola's disposal; but what was a mere five thousand pounds, when the deficit amounted to ten times the sum? Mr. Hargreaves did everything on a grand scale. He was a born gambler, it was hereditary; his grandfather had once lost thirty thousand pounds, after playing two nights and a day, and sitting up to his knees in cards. His worthy descendant had gone even more rapidly to work, staked all on a "chance" and lost—lost the estates which had been in the family since the reign of Edward the Fourth—lost his head—his hopes—his honour.

The next mail brought still heavier news to a certain good-looking subaltern in barracks at Gibraltar.

Lola wrote formally to dissolve her engagement. She was about to marry Mr. Reuben Waldershare, one of her father's creditors, who would cancel his debt, and buy back Earlsmead. Thus she saved her parent, and averted ruin from her people. Mr. Waldershare was enormously rich and generous.

Philip succeeded in obtaining leave on urgent private affairs that same hour, and journeyed to England that same night.

* * * * *

The Craven-Hargreaves had taken a house in London for the season. At four o'clock in the afternoon Gascoigne presented himself at 146 Mount Street, and inquired for Miss Hargreaves. The man—who was not an Earlsmead servant, and knew not Master Philip—said:

“Yes, sir, Miss Hargreaves is at home. Who shall I say?” and he preceded the visitor up the stairs, and ushered him into a pretty green and white drawing-room with a resonant—“Mr. Gascoigne, if you please.”

Secretly, the lady did not please.

Lola was alone, sitting on a low sofa, with her back to the light, and surrounded by morocco and velvet jewel-cases. She was dressed in a white gown, and wore a large picture hat, her gloves and parasol lay on a chair near her, and in her hands she held a row of great pearls. A tea equipage waited, the spirit-lamp flamed, and Lola's toilette betokened careful thought. The room was fragrant with exquisite La France roses, an arm-chair was drawn up invitingly near the sofa—evidently some

one was expected, but obviously that some one was not Philip Gascoigne.

"Philip," she almost screamed, as the door closed and she rose to her feet, her face white to the lips, "*what* has brought you?"

"You can easily guess," he replied, as he came forward; "your letter."

"Yes—of course," and she held out both her hands; "but, oh, why did you come?—it only makes it harder."

"You are talking in riddles," he answered sharply. "I want you to tell me the truth—face to face. Why do you wish to break off our engagement? Why does my return make anything *worse*?"

"Because—seeing you brings everything back—and I am going to marry Mr. Waldershare."

She turned away and averted her face to hide her emotion.

A long silence followed this announcement, and at last Philip said:

"Well, I don't suppose anything could be worse than that!"

As he spoke, Lola sank back on the sofa, and stealthily displaced some of the jewel-cases under the big brocade cushions.

"Will you listen to me?" she said piteously.

"Oh, yes, I am here to listen. I have come a thousand miles since Monday to listen—and to speak."

"Phil, when you hear all you will be twice as sorry for me as you are for yourself. Do you know that we are ruined?"

"I gathered as much," he replied gravely.

Father has been gambling on the Stock Exchange—he has lost everything. Earlsmead, that has been centuries in the family; and not only that—it is not merely ruin—it is disgrace,” and as she spoke, Lola put her hands over her eyes.

“Disgrace,” repeated Gascoigne. “It is impossible.”

“It is not really father’s doing,” she sobbed. “He got mixed up with shady people, and lent them his good name—and now it is smirched, or will be—the catastrophe is impending—the only door of escape is—Mr. Waldershare. He will advance money—he will stifle scandal—he is enormously rich——”

“And the reason for his liberality?” demanded Philip in a harsh key.

“Is here,” replied Lola, laying her hand on her breast. “I marry him to save our good name—and Earlsmead.”

“In short, you sell yourself for your family?” he cried.

“I think you might say—sacrifice myself—for my family,” she answered softly, and her eyes were eloquent.

“And *I* am also to be sacrificed?”

“Always remember that you are free—whilst I am bound—for life.”

“And you are prepared to throw me over, to marry a man old enough to be your father?” he questioned.

“Yes; but, after all, what is age! and—— (home-thrust) “your own mother—dear Aunt Venetia—did the same.”

Philip now began to pace the room, whilst Lola looked furtively at the clock. At last he came to a halt, and said:

“What does your mother say?”

“Nothing, poor dear, for she *knows*. The boys, Edgar and Billy, are simply furious with me. They have not seen the family skeleton—they think I am doing this—because—Mr. Waldershare is fabulously rich—and they say I have no more heart than a sea anemone. Bill declares that I was always greedy, and took more than my share of jam and the pony, and neither of them will come to the wedding. They will never forgive me, and neither will you——” and Lola buried her face in a cushion, and wept—that is to say, drew long, gasping sighs.

“Listen to me, Lola,” said her lover, authoritatively; “I have a suggestion to make.” She looked up quickly, and dried her eyes with a scrap of lace. “My idea is not as mad as it sounds. I have ten thousand pounds in the funds. It is my own, and yours. Let us pay your father’s most pressing claims with this—always remember that it is yours as much as mine. I will leave the service, and we will all go to New Zealand, you and I—your father and mother—and the boys, if they like?”

Lola sat erect, and stared at him fixedly and gasped; but he was too full of his subject, and too profoundly in earnest, to notice her expression.

“You see,” he resumed, “I am a really fair practical engineer, and I’ll build our quarters; your father and I can farm. There is a splendid breed of horses, a fine climate, a fine country; we will make a fresh start in life; we shall all be together—

what do you say, Lola? If you agree, I'll set about the move to-day," and he confronted her eagerly.

"What do I say to, emigrating to New Zealand?" she repeated, in a queer, choked voice, "to living in a back block, and—doing the washing?" Then, in a totally different key. "Of course, I'd be happy—anywhere with *you*, Phil, in 'No Man's Land' or Timbuctoo—your offer is like yourself—it reminds me of the time you sold your watch to help Billy out of a hole. But this hole is too big—ten thousand would be a mere drop in the ocean. Philip," she continued, as she rose and came towards him, "it is no use trying to play hide-and-seek with fate. My fate is to redeem my father's name. You are the man I love—Mr. Waldershare is the man I shall marry. Can't you see it with my eyes? You know our home—you are one of *us*—don't make it harder for me. I must go my own way."

"And I am to go to the devil," he said hoarsely.

"Oh, don't talk like that," she remonstrated; "it is not like you——"

"I don't know what I'm like—or where I am to-day. In one blow I lose everything."

"How?" she inquired.

"You were everything to me."

"And in future I must be nothing but a memory. Mr. Waldershare has had a hint—a girl told him—of our boy and girl attachment. He is desperately in love."

"So am I," cried her companion.

"Desperately jealous."

"So am I," he reiterated.

"I may never see you or write to you again, Phil;

it will be the best," she urged piteously, and never had she looked so lovely. "It is terrible for you—it is ten times worse for me. Some day you will be sorry for me—not now, you are too sorry for yourself."

She was alarmingly pale and nervous, her eyes wandered anxiously to the clock; nothing that Philip could urge would shake her from her purpose. She remained as white and as immovable as marble; her decision was irrevocable—the step was irretrievable. She was sacrificing herself for others, and "it"—the announcement of the engagement—was already in the papers.

With urgent entreaties to leave her, an impassioned farewell, and a torrent of tears, Lola sent Philip from her presence—and, oh! the relief, when she saw him depart! As he stood on the doorstep, a hansom dashed up, and for a moment Gascoigne beheld his supplanter. The man descended heavily, a clumsy, elderly individual, with a big nose, bulging eyes, and a short grey beard. In a second the visitor recognised his rival, a well-set-up, gallant young fellow, whose handsome face looked white and haggard, a man of attractive personality, in short, a most formidable opponent. No, no, he and Lola were best apart; there would be no correspondence, no old playfellow nonsense, no sentiment. He was peculiarly alive to the disparity in his and Lola's age, and set his face as a flint against younger men. Mr. Waldershare was in the iron trade; his first wife had been a homely body, who had assisted him to lay the foundation of his colossal fortune. He might almost call himself "the Iron King;" now he

was in quest of an "Iron Queen," and that with the eye of a keen, practical man of business. She must be the very best article on the market; young, well-born, and an undeniable beauty. Lola Hargreaves answered these requirements; added to which she had a certain amount of indolent ambition, and a delicate appreciation of the good things of life.

It was true that her father was on the verge of bankruptcy, and mixed up with a sultry business connected with a mine, but his forebears had been crusaders, their monuments and deeds were extant in print and marble. Mr. Waldershare respected a fine pedigree—the one thing his thousands could not purchase—so he decided to marry Lola Hargreaves. That Lola had "a friend," he was aware; he had unexpectedly come face to face with him, a good-looking, manly young fellow, he did not propose to place himself in competition with a man of half his years, so he issued an edict—"Lola must drop young Gascoigne," and Lola obeyed. The interview in Mount Street had changed the whole course of Philip's life at one stroke; he had lost friends, sweetheart, home—for Earlsmead would be closed to him, and the boys naturally would avoid the man their sister had jilted. He exchanged immediately into the Indian service, with the stern resolve to woo the goddess of war, and to enlist under the standard of ambition. By-and-by, as she predicted, he became intensely sorry for Lola. He admired her lofty principles, her noble character, her unselfish devotion, and she was enshrined in his memory with the lustre of a treasure that is lost.

CHAPTER XV

LOLA

SINCE Angel had left Ramghur the hot winds of three seasons had swept over her mother's grave, killed the plants in pots, and defaced the lettering on the cheap headstone (Mr. Shafto was in error for once.) The dead woman who lay beneath was absolutely forgotten, even by her dirzee, who now owned a thriving shop in the bazaar. A community fluctuates in an Indian station more than in any part of the Empire, and to the present inhabitants of the cantonment, the name of Lena Wilkinson failed to conjure up any figure whatever, much less a pretty face and an unrivalled toilette. The Ram Gunga bridge was complete at last, and Philip Gascoigne was free; free to enjoy a year's holiday in Europe, and the weeks and days in Angel's almanac were now crossed off down to the one which had a big red circle drawn around it, the date when he was due to arrive in London. To do the young man justice, after he had called upon his tailor, his first visit was to a certain girl's school at Wimbledon. How *distracted* Angel had been all the morning, secretly trembling with anticipation and agitation; and her hands were as ice, her heart was beating in her throat, as she opened the drawing-room door. There stood a gentleman in a long frock coat, with a hat in his hand. He had Philip's eyes. Somehow she had al-

ways pictured him in his khaki uniform or blue patrol jacket.

For his part, when a tall, graceful girl glided into the room, he scarcely recognised her. But it was the old Angel who flew at him with a cry of "Philip," flung her arms round his neck, and sobbed for joy. Then she led him to the window, and there they scrutinised one another exhaustively. He was but little altered, though there were lines on his forehead, and two or three silver hairs on his temple. Angel was naturally the most changed of the two; her thin, pinched features; her white, dried-up skin, had given place to the bloom of health and a delicate complexion; her blue eyes were no longer sharply suspicious, but soft and gentle; and the hard little mouth was wreathed in happy smiles.

Yes—Shafto was right. The child was going to be a beauty after all.

"Let me have a good look at you," said Gascoigne, he was Captain Gascoigne now; "I want to see if I can find any trace of the old Angel?"

She coloured, and laughed, as she replied, "No—not even a goose quill, or a pin feather. I've forgotten every word of Hindustani. I can't dance or crack my fingers, and I hate the sight of curry. Well, what do you think of me?" she asked, tossing back her hair with a laugh, and a heightened colour.

"I think you have grown—at least four inches," he responded deliberately.

"And you have grown grey," she retorted quickly; "I see some grey hairs there above your ear."

"Then, Angel," he said, "I hope you will respect them."

"Always, always," she promised gaily. "Oh, cousin Philip, I began to be afraid you were never coming home; I do hope you will think I have worked well."

"I am sure of that; I felt immensely proud of your sketches, and I have given your swagger tea-cosy to Mrs. Gordon."

"It was intended for you—and for the old red teapot," she protested.

"Far too smart for that, Angel; and I hear you are proficient in French and dancing, and the riding master's best pupil."

"Just because I'm not afraid and always take the pulling chestnut," she responded, "and that is only an amusement. I'm not good at German or arithmetic. People think I am cleverer than I am."

"Oh, people do think you clever?" he said with affected surprise.

"Only" (with a blush) "the other girls."

"You and I must have some holidays together, Angel, and go up the river, and see the pictures and do some *matinées*. I shall be in London for a couple of months."

"Only a couple of months," she exclaimed in a tone of dismay, "and how the time will fly—and then?"

"Then I am going to Norway to fish—and now I must be returning to town."

* * * * *

Captain Gascoigne proved as good as his word. He frequently came down to Wimbledon and took

Angela and one of her schoolfellows to *matinées*, picture-galleries, flower-shows, dog-shows, and concerts, gave them tea and ices, and delivered them at home ere nightfall. Latterly he invited Angel alone, as he became aware that she was excessively jealous of his society, grudged every word he spoke to her friend, and desired to have him all to herself. In spite of her gentle and refined manners, her cultured accent and docility, he was conscious that beneath that disguise, lived the old impetuous, forcible spirit, who loved him with the same fierce love which she had lavished upon her mother. The sight of this flame, when it occasionally burst out, in a word or a glance, seriously alarmed him. He had nothing wherewith to meet it but a cool affection, and a certain vague pride in the pretty, charming child, the delicate rosebud that had developed out of a wild little thorn-bush. What he could not repay in affection, Philip endeavoured to make up in indulgence: as it was, the pair went on the river, and to Hampton Court; he loaded her with gifts, and every one of the other girls envied Angel her guardian. One misfortune they shared in common: neither of them had a home. Angel was compelled to spend her holidays at school, and he, to make his headquarters in rooms at Duke Street. Mrs. Craven-Hargreaves was dead, Mr. Hargreaves lived in Paris, the boys were abroad, Earlsmead was let, and Lola was the only member of the family in England. Mrs. Waldershare was a notable beauty; were not her full-length portraits exhibited in the Academy and the New Gallery? She had fulfilled her husband's hopes, and proved to be a wife to

dazzle the multitude, a star of the chandeliers, of garden parties, of race lawns, and stately receptions. Where was the Lola who cooked blackbirds, climbed trees, and ran wild? There was no trace of her in the capricious beauty who was admired, worshipped, and spoiled.

On a certain May morning when the Row was crowded, and the rhododendrons were a blaze of colour, as Philip and Angela sauntered onwards, they found themselves face to face with a party of four—two smart guardsmen, and two brilliant ladies. One of these came to a sudden halt, and gave a little faint exclamation, as she offered her white gloved hand to Captain Gascoigne.

“Who would have thought of seeing you?” she drawled. “Are you in England?”

“He is in London,” burst out the old Angel with an irrepressible flash of Ramghur, for Philip’s speech was slow in coming. The other lady tittered, and the two men took the measure of this grave stranger whom “Mrs. Wal” had distinguished with her notice.

“I came home a month ago,” he said at last.

“And who is the child?” she continued, in her leisurely voice.

“A little cousin—Angela Gascoigne.”

“I never knew you had one.”

“How are they all?” inquired Philip with an effort, “your father and the boys?”

“Billy is in Egypt and Edgar in India. Haven’t you come across him?”

“No; I wish I had, but India is larger than you

suppose. Is your father at Earlsmead?" he continued.

"No, he lives in Paris by preference. Earlsmead is let, and so modernised and changed—you'd hardly know it—electric light, white paint, Tottenham Court Road furniture. You are horrified, but I don't mind. I shall never see it again—and besides I am modern myself," and she laughed. "Let me introduce you to Colonel Danvers." The men bowed. "Captain Gascoigne is a very old friend of mine," she added gaily, "our acquaintance dates from our high chairs in the nursery." As she talked on, Angela stood by, regarding her with close attention and a steady stare. A stare which absorbed every item of the face before her, the languorous dark eyes, fluffy brown hair, delicate complexion, and flexible red mouth. She also absorbed a general impression of an elegant toilette, with soft lace and rustling silk, and drooping feathers, a long glittering chain, and the perfume of heliotrope. This was Lola, hateful, cruel, heartless woman—Lola of the photograph.

"Where are you staying?" she resumed. "Oh, the Rag, I remember, is your club. You'll come and see me, won't you, Phil?"

"Thank you," he rejoined somewhat stiffly.

"I'll look over my engagement book and drop you a line. We are blocking up the whole place, I see. Good-bye," and she smiled, nodded, and moved on.

Angel turned and stared after her. She watched the pale lilac gown and black plumed hat as their wearer made a majestic progress through the crowd, with a nod here, a bow there; at last she stepped

into an open carriage, followed by the other lady, and was whirled out of the park.

Then the child seemed to awake from a sort of trance, and realised that her attitude was equally rude and remarkable.

"What are you doing, Angel?" inquired her cousin; "what are you thinking of?"

"I'm——" and she glanced up at him—his face looked white, or was it the glare?—"thinking, that I hate her."

"What on earth do you mean?" he asked sharply.

"I mean the lady in the black hat, who spoke to you—who knew you in the nursery——" rejoined Angel in gasps. "I've seen—her before—she is a doll—a wicked doll."

"You are mistaken, you have never seen her in your life, and she is neither a doll, nor wicked. You should not say such things," he remonstrated sternly.

"But I may think them," she retorted rebelliously.

"No, you may not."

"What is her name?" she asked, with a kind of sob.

"Mrs. Waldershare—I have known her nearly all my life."

They walked on for a considerable time in dead silence.

"Are you vexed with me, cousin Phil?" faltered Angel at length, and in a faint voice. Her eyes were deep with devotion and darkened with tears.

"No, but I wish you would not take sudden dislikes to people, Angel, and sit in judgment at a moment's notice."

"I can't help it. I make up my mind, and I like

and dislike then and there. There is—love at first sight.”

“Is there? Well, you can’t know anything about *that*.”

“No, but I can understand hate at first sight,” and she drew a long, intense breath.

“The sooner you turn that current of thought out of your mind the better for yourself, Angel. You should only look for good in other people. It always pays. Come along now, and let us feed the ducks.”

With respect to Captain Gascoigne’s own sensations, he had been prepared for the encounter ever since he had returned to London, and had steeled himself to meet his former *fiancée* with true British self-possession. Moreover, he had caught sight of her at a theatre and dining in a smart restaurant, so the first edge of the sharp wind had been tempered.

In a short time he and Angel were absorbed in feeding the ducks, oblivious of their recent little scene, and presently they went off to lunch in Piccadilly, and “do” a *matinée* in the Strand. This was not the only momentous encounter that the couple experienced; within a month a second was impending, which made a still greater impression on them both.

CHAPTER XVI

GRANDMAMMA

THREE weeks later, on a broiling June afternoon, as Angel and her guardian were strolling down the shady side of Bond Street on their way to strawberry ices, they passed a carriage waiting outside a shop, in which was seated a slight, smart lady, with a great white feather boa round her neck, a wonderful toque on her head, and a tiny dog on her arm. She was directly facing them, and as the couple came closer she beckoned to Philip imperiously; he approached at once, and swept off his hat.

"Do you mean to tell me that you were going to pass me by, Philip Gascoigne?" she demanded in a high, reedy voice. "Don't you know who I am?"

"Why, of course I do, Aunt Augusta," he protested; "but I did not recognise you at the moment—the light was in my eyes. I hope you are well?"

"Yes, I'm always well, thank you. I'm only just back from Aix. When did you return?"

"About two months ago."

"And never called—or left a card. Oh, you young men of the present day!"

"I did call, but the house was in curl-papers," rejoined Philip. "I gave my card to an old woman in the area." (He was not enthusiastic about his aunt by marriage, between whom and his mother lay a great gulf; Lady Augusta looked with scorn on her

country sister-in-law, who employed a local dress-maker, and was a frumpish, prudish, handsome creature, devoted to her books, her garden, and her boy.)

Lady Augusta's quick eyes presently travelled to Philip's companion; the painted face behind the white veil grew rigid. At last she said, in a strangely forced voice:

"I need—not ask—who she is. She is—Antony's girl."

As she spoke she fumbled for her long-handled glasses, and held them to her eyes. Her hand and her voice were both shaking as she said, "Come here, child."

Angel gravely advanced in her most approved school manners, and confronted the lady who was so curiously inspecting her, with serious eyes.

"Pray, do you know who I am?"

"No, ma'am," answered Angel.

"Can you guess?" asked the lady sharply.

She shook her head and waited.

"Well then, I'll tell you; I am your grandmother."

"Grandmother," repeated Angel incredulously, and her face grew quite pink. She glanced interrogatively at Philip. Was this lady joking, or was she mad?

"I see you can hardly believe your ears; it does seem ludicrous," said Lady Augusta; "but I was married when I was not much older than herself," she explained to her nephew in an aside, "Well, child, what have you got to say? I suppose you have a tongue?"

Poor Angel, thus adjured, immediately gave utterance to the wrong thing. "Are—you my—mother's

mother?" she inquired, and there was a note of keen anxiety in her voice.

"Oh dear, no," rejoined the newly-found relative in a tone of fierce repudiation. "I am your father's mother, Lady Augusta Gascoigne; he was my youngest son. Philip," turning to him, "I must have a talk with you. Get into the carriage, and let me drive you both back to tea."

As this was an offer not to be despised, an opportunity he dare not let slip—for it might be of some benefit to Angel—Captain Gascoigne and his charge accepted the unexpected invitation, and the next minute they were seated in Lady Augusta's landau. Once arrived at Hill Street, she led the way up to her drawing-room, and there discovered her daughter extended on the sofa, engrossed in a book. Eva at once struggled up awkwardly, letting a large piece of coarse knitting roll to the floor. She was a thin, high-shouldered woman, with a mass of coarse red hair and a droop in one of her eyelids, keenly sensitive of her own shortcomings, and much prone to good nature and good works.

"So this is what you call working for the Deep Sea Mission?" exclaimed her parent as she rustled across the room. "See—I have brought Philip Gascoigne."

Philip advanced promptly and took her limp hand, and said, "It is ages since we have met, cousin Eva." But she was not listening to him. Her eyes were riveted on the tall child who followed him.

"It is Antony's girl," explained her mother brusquely. "Yes, the likeness is—amazing."

Eva's face worked convulsively. Antony had been her favourite brother; he, the flower of the flock,

with his gay blue eyes and light-hearted character; she, the wretched ugly duckling; yet they had been inseparable, and she had cried herself to sleep for many nights after his departure for India, full of spirits, hopes, and courage. Then had come scrapes, debts, his deplorable marriage and his death; and now after all these years—fifteen years—he seemed to have returned to life in the steadfast face of his blue-eyed daughter. For a moment she could not speak for emotion; then she came forward and took both of Angel's hands in hers, and said:

“Oh, my dear, my dear—I am glad to see you—I am your Aunt Eva!”

“Eva is my second name,” said Angel softly. Miss Gascoigne's white face coloured vividly.

“And what is your first?”

“Angel.” This was another family name.

Tea was brought in by two men-servants with considerable circumstance and pomp, and Angel's little worldly heart beat high when she realised that all these fine things, the silver, the footmen, the pretty pictures and surroundings, belonged to her grandmamma—and her grandmamma belonged to her. Meanwhile Lady Augusta talked incessantly to Philip, questioned him sharply respecting his service and his prospects, wandering away to race-meetings and her book on Goodwood, with here and there a highly-spiced item of news; but all the time she watched her grauddaughter narrowly, her manners, her way of eating, sitting, speaking. Fortunately Miss Morton's pupil came forth from that ordeal unscathed. Angel, for her part, glanced uneasily from time to time at this old young lady, with the

pretty slim figure, the pretty fresh toilette, the faded eyes and wrinkled hands, the beautiful complexion, and the wealth of sandy hair.

"Eva," said her mother suddenly, "you can take this child away to the conservatory and show her the canaries. I want to have a quiet chat with Philip now; and you may make each other's acquaintance," she added indulgently. Miss Gascoigne rose with alacrity, and led the way to a small greenhouse which jutted out over the back landing, where hung various cages of shrill canaries. But the visitors did not look at these—only at one another.

"Dear child, how glad I am to know you!" said her aunt, taking Angel's face between her hands and gazing once more into a pair of sweet familiar eyes. "I hope we shall often see you. Now my mother never told me of your existence. She is a strange woman—but I believe she is pleased with you."

"I did not know that I had a grandmother—or an aunt—until to-day," said the child. "I am so astonished—the girls will be so surprised when I tell them I have a grannie and an aunt all this time in London. I always thought—grandmothers—were different."

"Your grandmother is different to most people," granted her aunt.

"And why has she never asked me here—nor written to me—why does she stare at me as if there were something odd about me? Is there anything odd about me, Aunt Eva?"

"No indeed, my dear."

"There must be some reason—do please tell me—

why I never heard of you till to-day. I am twelve years old."

"Your grandmother was very much vexed when your father married," explained Miss Gascoigne with obvious reluctance.

"Why?" came the question, like a blow.

"Oh, because he was a mere boy, only twenty-two, and she did not like your mother. My dear, you must never speak of her here," she continued, lowering her voice till it became a whisper.

"Do you suppose that I shall ever come to a house where I may not speak of my mother?" blazed Angel.

"There, I see you have your father's spirit!" exclaimed her aunt. "He and I were always such friends, I nearly broke my heart when he died. You will come here, Angel, I know—because you would like to give me pleasure—you will love me for his sake."

"Oh, well—perhaps," acquiesced the girl, to whom her father's name conveyed no impression beyond that derived from a faded photograph of a fair youth in a gorgeous uniform.

"Have I any more aunts or uncles?"

"Two aunts—Lady Harchester and Lady Lorraine. You are not likely to meet them—they seldom come here. You and I are going to be great friends, Angel. You must write to me and I will write to you—and go and see you—often."

* * * * *

"Not much of the Shardlow about the child," remarked Lady Augusta complacently. "Quite a

Gascoigne, or rather—I see a great resemblance to myself.”

Philip made no reply. He was unable to agree with this opinion, and put his hand to his mouth to hide a smile.

“And now I want to ask your plans. What are your ideas? So far, I must confess, she does you credit.”

“She does credit to Miss Morton and herself. I believe I shall keep her at school till she is eighteen,” he answered thoughtfully, “and then try and place her with some nice people who will take an interest in her and make her happy. Indeed, I am at the present moment looking out for some such family who will receive her for her holidays; it’s rather rough on her to have to spend them at school.”

“If you mean that as a hit at me, Philip,” said his listener, “I do not mind in the least; my conscience is clear. When her father disgraced himself by that wretched marriage, he and his were *dead* to me. Still when I saw the child this afternoon, something in her expression gave my heart-strings a tug. I felt agitated—besides the child resembles me—the only grandchild that is like me. It will be rather odd if, after all, Antony’s girl turned out to be the prop of my old age. But I am going too fast, am I not?”

“Well, I don’t quite follow you—yet.”

“Look here, Philip,” she resumed briskly, “I am willing to receive Angela for her holidays”—this was an unexpected concession. “She can come up for a week-end at first; if she pleases me I will give her a home—when she leaves school; but on payment. I may as well have the money as strangers.

My jointure is but moderate, and I have great expenses. Angela will require a maid, and to be suitably dressed and taken about and properly introduced, as befits my granddaughter. What do you think of my proposal?"

"I think it is an excellent idea, and I agree to it most heartily," he answered; "that is, if you approve of Angela, and she is happy with you."

"Oh, she is sure to be happy with me," was the vainglorious reply; "and of course I shall feel the greatest interest in her, and take good care that she makes a brilliant match. She shall marry to please *me*."

If Philip knew anything of Angel, there would be two opinions on that subject.

"She will be a far more congenial companion than Eva, who, since her silly love affair with a doctor she met at Aix, has been the personification of seven wet blankets."

"Why did she not marry him?" inquired the simple bachelor.

"Because I put my foot down. A widower with two children—a mere nobody, too. Eva declared that he was the best, most benevolent and brilliant of men, and devoted to her. But that was rubbish; he only wanted her ten thousand pounds."

After this visit there were several teas and luncheons in Hill Street, not a few conferences in the drawing-room, and confidences in the conservatory. On one of these occasions—when all the preliminaries had been successfully arranged—Lady Augusta plumed herself like one of her own canaries as she remarked:

"It was a lucky day for you, Philip, when you met me in Bond Street. I have relieved you of your 'young girl of the sea,' otherwise I'm sure I don't know what would have been your fate—such an impossible position too—you, quite a young man, guardian to a pretty girl; you would either have had to marry her—or get a chaperon."

"Oh, I should never have come to that," he replied with unexpected decision. "Angel will be in England, if not with you, with others; and with six thousand miles of sea and land between us, surely we can dispense with a chaperon."

* * * * *

In due time Captain Gascoigne returned to the East, *via* America and Japan, and Angel passed into the hands of her grandmother. She grew up and left school with sincere regret, and many injunctions from Miss Morton, who deplored the departure of her favourite pupil, and contemplated her future with considerable apprehension. She had heard of Lady Augusta Gascoigne as a lively, worldly matron, fond of cards, racing, and racketing. What a guide and counsellor for a girl of eighteen!

"Miss Angel Gascoigne—by her grandmother, Lady Augusta Gascoigne," was a notification in a *Morning Post*, succeeding a March Drawing Room, and the "imp" was launched. She came out and enjoyed her first season, and was warmly welcomed in a set in which the only disqualification was a failure to be smart!

Angel was not the least afraid of granny, whom she alternately amazed, amused, delighted, and defied. She reversed the situation of aunt and niece, and was

Eva's steady support, confidante, adviser, and idol. She made the house gay with her songs, her light laugh, her flitting foot, her radiant young personality. Her cousins and aunts were electrified when they first met "Miss Gascoigne;" her aunt was almost always "Poor Miss Eva." Their attempts at patronage were easily disposed of; the quick wit and cool self-possession of the Angel of Ramghur combined with the grace and *aplomb* of the Angel of Hill Street was more than a match for the Harchesters and Lorraine girls. Seeing that she refused to pose as a mere nobody and a poor relation, they changed their point of view and became her sworn allies, admirers, and friends. Immediately after the London season Lady Augusta and her family left Hill Street for Aix-les-Bains.

* * * * *

During the time when Angel had been growing up and blooming into a beautiful and somewhat despotic girl, her guardian and cousin had developed into an enthusiastic worker, a would-be Empire builder. At first, his duty had been among the canals and the distribution of the water supply; he had to see that every village received its due share of water; in the slack season he had to superintend works of construction and repair. He had no society, and no amusements. These years of solitude had a certain effect on his character. He spent his time marching from one canal to another, accumulating stores of experience regarding the conditions under which the peasants lived; his work was tedious and monotonous, but Gascoigne was a young man of active habits and observant eye; he was never dull, and his

character was setting into the solitary mould. His manners were a little stern. His feelings were under iron control, but he was always tender to animals and suffering. From the canals Gascoigne was promoted to the frontier, thanks to a little war. Here he had distinguished himself so brilliantly that he was decorated, and wrote D.S.O. after his name. He enjoyed the hardships; the keen, exciting existence, the smell of powder, the chances of life and death, stirred his pulses. Indeed, once or twice he and death had met face to face; but he kept these encounters to himself, and they were only talked about in the men's tents, or a word was dropped in the messroom. He never got into the papers—and yet he was known by hundreds as “Sangar” Gascoigne.

It happened when the night had closed in rain, and rolling clouds blotted out the camp lights, that he and a handful had gone back in the dark to look up some stragglers, and had beaten off the wolfish Afghans, and stood by their wounded till dawn and relief. It was an experience to turn a man's hair white and it turned one man's brain. Let those who know what night brings to the wounded and “cut off” testify if their fears were not well founded?

The hardships, the horrors, the honours, of a short but fierce campaign had left their marks on Philip; this and the two years' solitary canal duty had changed him, perhaps, even more in the same period than his pretty cousin Angela.

He was again in the North-West Provinces, responsible for a great district, and well worthy of responsibility, though but thirty-seven years of age.

He was self-reliant, able, and energetic, and if reserved and given to sarcasm, Gascoigne was popular, being generous and hospitable to a fault. His bungalow was well appointed; all that it wanted was a mistress (so said the ladies of the station). But Philip Gascoigne's thoughts did not lean towards matrimony; his tastes were solitary and simple; when away on duty or on the frontier, no one lived a harder or more frugal life. He was well inured to the Indian climate, master of several tongues; he had a capital head for ideas, a mathematical mind; his heart was in his work, his profession was his idol. Work with him amounted to a passion, and had effectually chased love from his thoughts. He was one of the men whom luxury and decadence had left untouched, and upon whom the executive business of the Empire, in its remoter parts, could depend. Gascoigne was so good-looking, cheery, popular, and eligible that many women spread their nets in the sight of that *rara avis*, an agreeable, invulnerable bachelor. Over a series of years he had successfully eluded every effort to "catch him," and kept all would-be mothers-in-law politely at a distance.

By this time he was given up as a hopeless case, and one indignant matron had said in her wrath:

"Major Gascoigne will let every chance of a suitable wife go by, and when he is in his dotage will make a fool of himself by marrying a girl in her teens."

But so far Major Gascoigne was a long way from dotage, or the fulfilment of this disastrous prediction.

CHAPTER XVII

THE UNEXPECTED

It was the month of September in the Himalayas, when the rains are heaviest, landslips frequent, and whole hillsides crumble and slide into the valley with a sound of thunder, that Major Gascoigne was summoned up to Kumaon in order to cope with a series of disasters. Bridges had been destroyed by racing torrents, roads were washed away; such floods had not visited these regions for twenty years, so said the hill folk, and traffic between the stations of Shirani and Chota-Bilat was practically at an end. It was not that the roads were impassable, but that there were no roads whatever. The common route by the river (to reach the so-called staircase) was now a boiling torrent, which had risen in its fury and torn away pieces of the great cart road, and dragged down and swallowed walls, buttress, bridges. Under these circumstances, when troops were waiting to march, and most people were moving towards the plains, transport and traffic were paralysed, and loud was the outcry.

Major Gascoigne had taken possession of the engineers' house, a little building far away from road and river, perched high among the rhododendrons over the valley, consisting merely of two rooms, verandah and cook-house, and furnished to meet the simple requirements of one man. Philip

liked the isolated spot, where he heard nothing but the crow of the jungle cock and the roar of the water. It was one of his favourite halting-places when he came up on inspection duty. No cell could be more solitary, or absolutely out of the track of the world. Here he worked at his book on fortifications, here he kept a store of favourite authors, here he was happy; it was his asylum—his cave. The cave was beautifully situated, and, although it commanded a sweeping view of the neighbouring hills and distant snows, yet, to the cursory eye, the little brown house was almost buried amid rhododendrons, oak and tall tree ferns. The last week in September witnessed many landslips, several accidents, and much rain. Since daybreak the "Engineer Sahib" had been personally superintending the damming of a fissure and the construction of a temporary bridge. Towards three o'clock in the afternoon, tired, mud-stained, and extremely hungry, he set his pony's head towards home. After a long *détour* they scrambled up the slippery, greasy path, crossed with great tree-roots, and at last reached their destination.

Here Gascoigne gave the pony to his attendant, and called out impatiently, "Qui hye."

Instead of the usual prompt answer to this summons, the glass door into the verandah opened very slowly and a grey-haired ayah, in a red cloth jacket, appeared and signed to him to be silent. But Gascoigne was not a man to take orders from strangers in his own house, and he walked up the steps, motioned her aside, and entered the sitting-room.

There on the shabby cane lounge was extended a fair-haired woman—a mere girl, with one hand un-

der her head, the other hanging limply down, fast, fast asleep. A little cloth jacket was thrown over her feet, a hat with wet feathers lay on his writing-table among all his most sacred papers, and a damp umbrella dripped steadily in a corner.

Evidently a traveller who had mistaken his cave for the Dâk Bungalow. This was Gascoigne's first idea. He looked at her a second time, and it struck him that there was something familiar in the shape of the face, the pencilled dark brows, the delicate nostrils, and he experienced a sudden spasm of horror as he realised that he was contemplating—Angel! Angel, whom he believed to be established with her grandmother in Haute Savoy, from whom he had received a cheery letter quite recently. Unquestionably her talent for executing the unexpected was supreme. It bordered on the miraculous. He suddenly recalled Shafto's prophecy that "her future course was incalculable," as he closed the door softly, and, beckoning the ayah to a distance, said:

"Where have you come from?"

"Bombay, sahib," was her prompt reply. "Missy and one lady engaged me two days ago, the other mem-sahib going up country. At junction, my missy asking there, and people telling sahib no in Marwar, sahib in jungle and all roads gone," she paused to take breath, and resumed, "but that missy coming all the same, plenty bad way, no littlely small path for one dog, missy never fraiding, she only laugh and tell coolie men to go on—go on—I plenty fraiding, missy only wanting to come to sahib—soon—soon—quick."

The sahib impatiently motioned the woman away,

and she swiftly disappeared in the direction of the cook-house. Here was a pretty business, a nice dilemma in which Angel had placed him. Major Gascoigne, as he sat on the steps, an outcast from his own retreat, was in what Billy Hargreaves would have termed one of his "cold" passions. He had looked upon Angel as a solved problem—a charge made over to her grandmother on payment of so much per annum. She sent him charming, vivacious, and, yes, affectionate letters—such as a girl would write to an uncle or a brother; some day he expected she would marry (according to her grandmother, her admirers were as the sand of the sea in multitude), and then the last fraction of responsibility would fall from his shoulders.

Oh, why had he ever been such a cursed fool as to take the child at all? he asked himself bitterly, but when he recalled her mother's eyes—those eloquent, dying eyes, his heart told him the reason. He must get rid of Angel at once, but how, when, and where? The bearer now humbly craved his attention. He assured him that he had done all in his power to "keep the missy out;" as he spoke his expression became so tragic that Gascoigne was compelled to smile. As well as his recollection served him, should that Miss wish to enter, "to keep her out" was a hopeless task. He desired his somewhat ruffled factotum to prepare dinner, to pitch his tent, and make him some sort of shakedown; "the Miss Sahib" would occupy the bungalow that night, and leave early in the morning.

It would be impossible to take Angel away that evening; the roads were unsafe, and there was

another storm brewing. As he stood watching the clouds rolling up, and listening to the rumble of distant thunder, his mind groping for some means of speeding this most unwelcome "Angel in the house," a slight movement caused him to turn his head. There was his ward in the doorway, and against the dark background she stood forth a vision of youth, beauty, and joy. Yes, although her hair was tumbled, and she was obviously but half awake, Angela was a sight to make an old man young!

She came quickly towards him with outstretched hands. No, *no!* he was certainly not going to kiss her.

"Oh, Phil!" she exclaimed. "Dear old Phil—of course you are horrified to see *me*," and she looked up with lovely laughing eyes into his grave face. "But I really could not stand granny any longer—her gambling, and her friends, and her behaviour were quite too much for me. I just made up my mind at a moment's notice—and came away. When I explain everything, I am as certain of your approval as that I am standing here."

"Had you better not sit down?" said her host, dragging forward a verandah chair.

"Thank you," sinking into it and looking about her. "How perfectly delicious it is! Well, to go on with my story—I said to myself, why endure this dreadful life—when I can always go to Philip? He is my guardian, not grandmamma—so I sold my diamond ring for ninety pounds, and came straight off. I did not wire or write, in case you might forbid me to start. Now I'm here, of course, you cannot send me back. Now I've come such a long, long

way to find you—oh, do look a little bit glad to see me,” and she leant forward and laughed.

Angel was completely at her ease; her manner was that of a girl who had had all men under her feet. To Major Gascoigne the world had suddenly become topsy-turvy; this was Angel's house, he was the unexpected interloper, the runaway ward—and her attitude represented gracious welcome.

“Yes; but, Angel,” he began, making a vague effort to withstand this momentary vertigo, “although I am glad to see you, I am not pleased to see you—here.”

“But why not?” she asked with an air of bewildered injury. “This is my native land—you are my legal guardian. I belong to you, and not to grand-mamma. Oh, dear cousin Philip, do be nice. We have not met for six years—think of that—do not look so stern—please be glad to see me. *Please,*” urged this audacious and distracting creature, with the indescribable eyes and smile.

Well, after all, Philip Gascoigne was only a man. He succumbed, he relaxed, he threw dull care and dull disapproval from him—figuratively tumbled them both over the khud.

“You must be starving,” he said; “what would you like to have?”

“Tea, please,” was the prompt reply; “and I will make it. It will be like old times. I suppose the dear red teapot is no more?”

“Strange to say, it still exists, and is here.”

“Then I shall be glad to meet it immediately; and remember, I shall never forgive you for giving the tea-cosy to that Mrs. Gordon. You don't know the

pains it cost, the hours, and the tears, I stitched into it—my first piece of fancy work.”

No doubt the ayah had already ordered tea, it was so speedily brought into the verandah. Angel made it, and poured it out, chattering all the time, whilst the solemn, black, bearded servant watched her furtively with shocked but admiring eyes. Truly, these white women were handsome, but shameless. A quick order in fluent Hindustani caused him to start; the old familiar tongue had run to meet Angel in Bombay—in three days it was once more her own.

When tea was over and cleared away the young lady placed her elbows on the table, and resting her pretty face between her hands, said:

“I know you are dying to hear all about me—and I will tell you.”

“May I smoke?” inquired the master of the house.

“Certainly you may, and I will keep you company,” was the startling rejoinder, as Angel suddenly produced a pretty silver cigarette-case, held out her hand for a match, and proceeded to light up.

“You must know”—here she blew a cloud—“if you did not guess it from my letters, that granny and I did not hit it off. Of course my holidays were like trial trips, and nothing really to go by; our boilers did not explode, and we did not ram one another; but when I left Wimbledon last Christmas, and became a permanent affliction in Hill Street, it was different. I was too independent for granny; I did not take to racing, or cards, or the young men of her set.”

"But they took to you, by all accounts," interposed her listener.

"Oh, yes; but I soon let them see that the three-tailed Basha—pick up my handkerchief—come when you're called—style they affected to other girls would not go down with me. I snubbed them severely for a little change, and they liked it; the more I snubbed them, the more they grovelled, thankful for a word, ready to die for a smile. That is the attitude young men should assume towards young ladies," and Angela blew a ring of smoke, and watched it with calm approval. "When I came away, snubbing was the latest craze—the rage."

"It would depend upon who she was," said Gascoigne. "How would it work if the young lady were snub-nosed?"

"Oh—that is too difficult a question," said Angela with a gesture of fatigue.

"Why were you so death on these unfortunate youths? Why did they not meet with your approval?"

"Who could approve of creatures with a quarter of a yard of collar, and an inch of forehead, and whose only two adjectives were 'rippin' and 'rotten'?" demanded Angel. "Granny was vexed because I would not afford her the glory of a fashionable wedding, for she looked upon my obstinacy as a sinful waste of good matches. I would not marry myself," continued the girl imperturbably, "but I got Aunt Eva married—not quite the same thing in granny's eyes! Oh, she *was* furious. Her match-making fizzled out"—extending her hand dramatically—"but mine was a grand success."

"So Eva married the doctor after all?"

"Oh yes, an old love affair—lights like tinder," and Angel blew a great cloud of smoke from her nostrils. "Aunt Eva was my father's favourite sister, otherwise the butt of the family, because she was plain, unselfish, good, and cowardly. Dr. Marsh, who attended granny, noted her, admired her, and proposed. Eva would have been only too madly, wildly happy to say yes, but there was an uproar in the house. Granny nearly had a fit. She set her sisters on to talk poor Eva to death, and Eva submitted and caved in. She was very miserable, just granny's drudge; when I came to Hill Street I soon found that I was to be aunt—and she niece. I advised, scolded, lectured, and comforted her; assured her that she had her own life to live, not granny's, who had had a very good time. In short, I raised the standard of rebellion!" Here Angel laughed, and looked over at her companion with mischievous and triumphant eyes.

"And there was war in Hill Street," said Gascoigne, wondering how he was to deal with this daring insurrectionary charge, in whom the elements were mixed indeed.

"Civil war, I should call it," she responded. "I took the poor little love affair in hand and patched up the pieces. I scraped acquaintance with Dr. Marsh. He is a good man, works among the poor as well as the rich, and has a very keen sense of honour."

Gascoigne now threw away his unfinished cheroot and sat forward with folded hands. Was he dreaming, or was he listening to little pig-tailed Angel?

"He could not endure snubs," she continued composedly. "He had a modest opinion of himself, and had retired into his shell. By the way," she asked suddenly, "am I boring you? All this interested me so keenly that I forget that it may be deadly dull to other people."

"No—no, pray go on. I am all ears, and keenly interested too."

"Well, I had a long talk with Dr. Marsh; then I met him in the Academy by appointment. I told him I wanted him to explain a subject to me; when he arrived Eva was with me. They were mutually surprised. I told him the 'subject' was in the gem room—and then—I lost them. Was I not clever?" and she laughed like a child of nine.

"Very," came the somewhat gloomy assent.

"Aunt Eva has money of her own; she is past forty, quite old. Why should she not choose her own life, and have some little happiness before she dies?"

"Why not indeed?" he echoed mechanically.

"Because she was so yielding, so timid, so old-fashioned, so afraid of granny, who used the fact of her being her mother—a thing poor Eva could not help—as a reason for making her a slave for life. But I set her free," she announced in a clear, ringing voice. "Yes, Dr. Marsh was at Aix; he married Eva there. I was bridesmaid, witness, everything. They went off to spend the honeymoon in the Tyrol, and I was left to face—grandmamma."

"But you dared not—and bolted—I see."

"No, no," indignantly. "I'm not like that. Grandmamma was furious at first, but I talked her

round in two days. Dr. Marsh is a gentleman, cultivated, and presentable. He has a large practice. Granny began to see reason and to calm down. It was partly over an Italian Prince that we came to grief: Granny was so insistent, so shamelessly throwing me at his head, I could not endure it. He got on my nerves—and so did Aix. The dressing four times a day, the baths, the gossip, the gambling. I said to myself, I really must get away from all this, or I shall develop into a woman like granny. Granny can have one of the Lorraine girls to launch into life instead of me—she is not half so stiff-necked or headstrong.”

“Are you stiff-necked and headstrong?”

“Oh, yes, so Miss Morton used to say. A friend of mine, Mrs. Friske, heard my groans and lamentations, and said, ‘Why don’t you go out to your guardian? He is elderly; your home is really with him. India is much better than this.’ We talked it all over one night—she is very quick, clever, and impulsive—and I thought it out, and made up my mind to leave granny. I would not have done it so suddenly, but that one evening we had a terrible scene, oh——” and she caught her breath sharply. “I can never forget the things she dared to say of my—mother. We had not spoken of her before. I just packed up all my smart French frocks, sold my ring, Mrs. Friske took my passage from Marseilles, and away we went on board the *Arabia*. It was all so easy. We had a delightful time—lots of nice people coming out—and Mrs. Friske chaperoned me to Basaule Junction. In spite of the awful state of the hills, I came on straight, the wretched ayah gibber-

ing and screaming behind me, for I particularly wanted to arrive before grandmamma's letter." Angel drew a long breath, and said, "That's all—I've finished. Now it is your turn to speak, cousin Philip. Since I am here, what are you going to do with me?" and she looked up at him with a gaze of amused expectation.

"I shall take you down to Marwar to-morrow," was his prompt reply, "and as soon as the monsoon is over, send you—home."

"No, no, no, Philip," she remonstrated in a piteous key. "I won't go back. I realise now," putting her cigarette into the ash-tray, "that I have been—mad. I'd no idea you were so young." As she spoke she faltered a little, and a sudden wave of colour dyed her cheeks. It was her first and sole token of embarrassment. "You are not the grey-haired fatherly person I expected to see. You were getting grey years ago, and I thought—you'd be different. I've so much imagination—I've an excellent memory. I remembered how good you were to me when I was an odious, friendless child, and I—imagined—that you—would be pleased—to have me."

Her lower lip quivered as she concluded, and her eyes darkened with unshed tears. This was more than Saint Antony could have withstood. Philip Gascoigne was amazed to hear himself saying—or surely a stranger spoke: "Why, Angel, of course I am delighted to see you. Your coming has taken me aback, that is all; and I am a hardened old bachelor. not at all accustomed to young ladies."

"No, nor being turned out of your house into the wet jungle," she supplemented with a watery smile.

"If I am not so old as you expected, you are much older than I dreamt of. I always seem to see you in my mind's eye with a fair pigtail, and frock just reaching to your ankles."

"If you wish, I can return to both within the hour," she rejoined with a hysterical laugh. At this moment the ayah made her appearance round a corner, and said in her whining voice:

"Gussal tiar, Miss Sahib."

"It's my bath," she said. "I really must go and change. I feel such a grub ever since I left Bombay. *Au revoir*," and she sprang up, and left her guardian to his undisturbed reflections.

CHAPTER XVIII

DINNER FOR TWO

WHILST the young lady was changing her dress Gascoigne had another interview with his bearer, ere retiring into the damp tent to remove his wet clothes.

"Look here," he said, "you must do all you can to make the place nice for the Miss Sahib—tidy it up—and, I say, isn't there a lamp-shade?"

Abdullah assented with solemn complacency.

"There are no flowers, or dessert, but there's some chocolate—and see that the cook does not spare his stores, and has an eye to the ayah and coolies; they have all to be ready for an early start to-morrow." And having issued these orders, he departed to his damp quarters, where he experienced exasperating difficulties in finding his belongings, which had been hurled into the tent pell-mell. He had no looking-glass; he was actually obliged to do his tie at the back of his silver flask. How a woman upset a house! As Gascoigne searched wildly for a handkerchief, his thoughts were inhospitable—his mental expressions impassioned.

Meanwhile the bearer, thus put on his mettle, bustled about with feverish activity; he, like all natives, thoroughly enjoyed a crisis, an unexpected situation, a novelty, a commotion. He was also full of resource, but here his resources were so limited he had nothing to draw upon save his master's wardrobe, and he put it under contribution without delay.

The old lamp-shade was gracefully draped with yards of soft red silk—his master's cummerbund; the effect was so splendid and stimulating that he brought forth a certain treasured red and gold dress sash, and twisted it round the lamp with a quantity of beautiful forest leaves. This was the table decoration, and it looked extremely pretty and elegant. A blue military cape covered the deficiencies of a table, a plaid railway rug draped the shabby cane lounge, Gascoigne's two most cherished silk ties looped back the short window curtains, and when the deft-handed Abdul had placed lighted candles in every available spot and considered his work critically, he felt a thrill of honest satisfaction—the warm glow of an artist who beholds his ideal realised! The result was a transformation, and a success.

When dinner was ready, he went and knocked on the visitor's door; it opened promptly, and the young lady appeared; such a dazzling apparition that Abdul fell back three paces. Angel had dressed her hair elaborately—she abjured a fringe—it was parted in the middle, and turned back in great masses, and gathered up in a knot low on her neck, with one or two rebellious little curls peeping over her forehead. She wore a dark trailing skirt, and a white silk and lace blouse, with close-fitting lace sleeves. Nor were the little decorative touches which add so much to a toilette omitted; she wore turquoise ornaments, a picturesque silver belt, and a band of black velvet enhanced the whiteness of her throat. All three items gave Angel an impression of "full dress," and Gas-

coigne, as he surveyed this dainty vision, mentally did homage.

"I am rather smart—compared to what I was an hour ago," she said, addressing her host, "and considering that I only brought one small box with me—I left my luggage at the Junction, tons of trunks—oh, I am so fond of my frocks!" An hereditary passion, reflected her guardian.

(As Angel talked she was furtively scrutinising Philip, who had exchanged his wet riding kit for the irreproachable white shirt, black tie, and dinner coat of the period.)

"You are dazzling, I admit," he exclaimed, with a smile. "I feel as if I could only look at you through smoked glass." The girl laughed as she seated herself and glanced round.

"What a transformation scene—how pretty the table is! Why, we might be dining *tête-à-tête* at Prince's, and going on to a theatre. But I remember how clever native servants are—how they make a grand show out of nothing."

Here Philip recognised with a gasp his wardrobe, so to speak, decorating the table—yes, and the room.

"Especially our troupe," she continued; "Colonel Wilkinson saw to that."

"Have you any news of him?"

"Oh, yes," carefully helping herself to salt; her hands and wrists were exquisite. "He married again years ago, a woman with no end of money. She must have escaped from some lunatic asylum; don't let us talk of him. Let us eat, drink, and be merry."

"You won't get very merry on soda-water," he protested. "Have some claret?"

"I never touch it, thank you. Granny said it made one's nose red."

"And so you and Lady Augusta never hit it off after all?" he remarked.

"No; she was such a Saturday-to-Monday sort of grandmother! Always rushing here, and there, and back again, never at home except when she was asleep, always 'showing herself' somewhere, as she called it, always in the movement. I did not mind until she began to drag me with her, and insisted on showing *me*. Then she always dressed like my twin sister. Pray, what granddaughter could tolerate that?" Angel's expression became tragic, and Gascoigne laughed, quite a gay young laugh.

"I assure you that granny has the ditto of this very blouse I'm wearing; and," speaking with increased energy, "one of the last scenes I had with her was to prevent her wearing a white muslin gown; of course, it was drowned in lace, but imagine white muslin at sixty-five," and she gave an impatient and despondent sigh.

"It might have been seventy in the shade," acquiesced Gascoigne, ironically. "I'm afraid she must have been an immense responsibility. I can sympathise with you there."

"Oh, it was not really that," and Angel's voice suddenly became the grave utterance of a much older woman. Her eyes looked dark and tragic as she leant a little forward and said, "It was the closed door between us—we never spoke of my mother." Angel communicated this fact as if she were alluding to some holy saint, and Philip, the hypocrite, bent his head in profound sympathy. "No, never till that

once," resumed the girl. "It was the first and the last time. Our opinions were so opposed, it was as if two furious, long-leashed creatures had been suddenly let loose at one another's throats." After a little silence, during which she meditatively broke up bread, Angel suddenly looked over at her companion, and said: "Tell me, how do you like the way I do my hair now?"

Philip gasped mentally, but brought out an adequate reply. "Immensely—last time you wore it down your back."

"And so"—here she leant her elbows on the table, and locked her pretty hands, and looked over them at her guardian, "you are really going to take me down to Marwar to-morrow."

"I am really," he answered promptly, "weather permitting."

"How I hope the weather will not permit. I'd a million times rather stay up here in the jungle, the real delightful jungle, within reach of white bread, the post-office, and hairpins. I could sit and read, and dream, and sketch, and ride up and down the valleys for months, and be so happy. What a shame it is that one cannot enjoy what one *likes*."

"Unfortunately we often like what is bad for us," said her guardian drily.

Angel drew a sigh of assent, and then resumed, "We never would have found this place, only for one of my jampannis, whose brother is in your service; he knew the way; was it not luck?"

"Yes," agreed Major Gascoigne. (But *was* it?)

"The road was *nil*—in places it had slipped a hundred feet. We just crawled along the precipices

inch by inch, clinging on to roots and branches, tooth and nail."

"I must say it was very plucky of you to come."

"Oh, I did not mind a bit," said Angel carelessly. "And so your home is in Marwar?"

"Yes; I'm only up here on duty. There are several people you know in Marwar."

"Really?" raising her perfectly pencilled brows.

"Mrs. Gordon, for instance."

"Yes, to whom you presented my tea-cosy. I shall certainly take it back. Wasn't she a pretty dark-eyed woman, with a horrid old bearish husband?"

"What a memory you have!" he exclaimed. "And there is Shafto."

"Who always hated me," making room for the bearer to remove the cloth; "you cannot deny that." When the bearer had departed she put her elbows on the table, and, confronting her companion, said:

"Cousin Philip, I try to speak the truth to you—and I'll speak it now. I see that in rushing out here to you I've acted on a mad impulse—worse, perhaps, than cutting up Mrs. Dawson's dresses. I don't stop to think; I act; when I shop, I buy what I want, and—think afterwards if I can afford it. I never count the cost." She paused for breath. "I did not leave grandmamma without good-bye. I walked into her room when she was going to bed. I wanted to catch the night *rapide* to Marseilles, and said: 'I've come to say good-bye—as I'm off.' 'Where to?' she screamed. 'India,' I replied. I won't repeat what she said, but—well, she prophesied evil things. Her prophecy will not come true. I am resolved to be prudent, and obedient. I will

do whatever you wish, but oh! cousin Phil," stretching out her pretty hands, "please don't send me home—oh, please don't!"

"Very well, then, I won't," he replied, little knowing that he had thus sealed his fate; but, thanks to the sorceress, he was in a condition of mind in which to-day blotted out to-morrow.

It was an extraordinary experience. Would he awake and find he had been dreaming? or was he really sitting *tête-à-tête* in this lonely spot, with the most bewitching girl he had ever seen? As he sat endeavouring to focus his somewhat slow ideas—perhaps he was too reflective to be quite good company—Angela rose and began to walk about the room, critically inspecting the contents.

"I always made very free with your belongings, and your house," she said, "and"—with a laugh—"your horse. I see several little things that I remember so well," and she touched them as she spoke. "This old battered blotter and ink-bottle, and the frame with your mother's likeness—how sweet she looks." She took up the faded photograph, gazed at it for a long time, kissed it, and put it down very gently. "I see you have a lot of books—um—um—um—Fortifications—Mathematics—how dry! except 'Soldiers Three' and 'Vanity Fair.' I love 'Vanity Fair,' and, do you know," turning about with the volume in her hand, "I was always a little sorry for Becky."

"Pooh! she would have sneered at your sympathy," rejoined Gascoigne. "She never pitied herself."

"No, she despised herself. How I wish Dobbin

had not been endowed with such large feet, otherwise I believe he would be almost my favourite hero."

"Only his feet stand in the way—alas! poor Dobbin."

"Yes—ah, here you have something modern," opening another book:

*"La seul rêve interesse
Vive sans rêve qui est ce.
Et J'aime La Princesse Lointaine!"*

she quoted; "what a swing it has! Why, it is only seven o'clock," she announced, with one of her sudden changes of manner. "What can we do to amuse ourselves?"

And he realised, as she looked eagerly at him, that here was a young thing full of spirit and playfulness.

Angel, as she turned and surveyed her guardian where he still sat at table, the rose-shaded lamp throwing a becoming light on his clear-cut, dark face, and deep-set eyes, acknowledged with a sudden stab that here was a man as young, attractive, and marriageable, as many of her late admirers. The title of uncle or guardian was a ridiculous misfit.

For his part, he was wondering what he was to do with this graceful, radiant creature, full of life, will, vitality, and imagination. Perhaps it was just as well that she had broken away from Lady Augusta and her pernicious influence; but where was she to live? What was he to do with her? If he had been twenty years older.

Her question roused him, and he answered:

"I have no accomplishments whatever, and I throw myself upon your generosity."

"Well, I am very frivolous," she acknowledged, airily; "it is in my blood, and I know some parlour tricks." As she concluded she swept into the next room, and presently returned carrying a gaily-be-ribboned mandoline, and two packs of cards. "These were so useful on board ship," she explained, as she sat down; "made me quite run after. Ever so many people invited me to stay, but I told them I was coming out to my guardian." She paused, and then coloured vividly as she recalled the extraordinary contrast between the ideal grey-haired picture she carried in her mind's eye, and this young and vigorous reality. As she talked, she dealt out the cards. What pretty hands!—Gascoigne assured himself that he was in love—with her hands. "You play cards, of course?" she enquired, looking up at him with her direct gaze.

"Yes; whist only—strict whist, mind you; no Bumble puppy."

"Oh, that is because you belong to a scientific corps," with a shrug of extreme commiseration. "Nevertheless, your education is far from complete. I'll teach you euchre, poker, picquet, and ever so many good games of patience. Here is one for two," and she began to deal and explain.

The lesson proved so interesting that the couple were completely absorbed, and deaf to the rising of the storm, the crashing and clashing of trees around them, the roar of the downpour on the roof, and the thunder of the mountain torrents.

After the cards, music. Angel took up and tuned

her gay mandoline, seated herself in a low chair, and began to play and sing. Her voice was not powerful; it was sweet, it was delicious, and had been admirably taught. The fair syren sang several songs to Philip—spell-bound (as well as an enraptured audience of servants, jampannis, and coolies, who were secretly jostling one another in the back verandah, and among them was the ayah, who assumed the airs of a manager who introduces to the public a wonderful “Diva” whom *he* has discovered).

Philip leant back in his chair, his eyes fixed on the singer; she was giving “La Belle Napoli” with extraordinary charm and verve. What a pretty picture she presented, with her gay mandoline, her expressive face, her graceful pose—he would never forget this evening—never. It seemed as if the very goddess of youth and joy had descended on his shabby little home! Suddenly the music ended with a crash, and Angela half rose and cried:

“Who—are those women—looking in through the window?”

Gascoigne started up as if he had been struck; he followed her glance, and beheld a pair of weird visages glowering through the darkness. The face of Mrs. Flant—a woman with a tongue—and the face of her sister, Miss Ball, both acquaintances from Marwar.

These two ladies had been in desperate extremities; they had, in spite of all advice, insisted on descending—roads or no roads—to Marwar for a ball. Their jampannis and coolies had missed the path, night had fallen, the storm had burst, and there they all were benighted in the jungle. Even the

hill-men were at a loss, and grunted to one another interrogatively. One man remembered, as if by inspiration, the engineer's bungalow, and to this, after a weary toil and many interruptions, they made their way. There was a light—how welcome to the poor, forlorn ladies struggling far below in outer darkness. At last they reached the long-prayed-for shelter, crawled out of their jampans, and looked in at the window, whilst some of their bearers ran, shouting, to the servants' quarters. The recent and somewhat noisy arrival was, to the inmates, drowned by the roar of the elements. The two ladies gazed in—there was barely room for both their faces in the little window, and this was what they saw. An extravagantly-illuminated room, a crimson-shaded lamp on the table, cards scattered in all directions, comfort to correspond. Major Gascoigne, in evening dress, leaning back in his chair, smoking, listening with obvious rapture to a pretty girl—yes, a smartly-dressed girl—a complete stranger to them, who was evidently supremely at home, and singing to a gaily-decorated mandoline. What a picture of dissipation! Could they believe their eyes? Was this how Major Gascoigne, the eligible but impregnable bachelor, spent the time when he was supposed to be deeply immersed in his work—and his duty?

Mrs. Flant rapped her knuckles against the window pane; the summons was imperious. Gascoigne jumped to his feet; his face was a shade graver, as he said:

“It is some people who have lost their way.”

“Why, of course, it never rains but it pours,” said

Angel, putting down the mandoline with a gesture of impatience, as her cousin opened the door and admitted the drenched wayfarers.

These entered with cold, suspicious eyes, and brought with them a gust of icy, driving rain, which caused the lamp to flare.

"We lost our way," announced Mrs. Flant, from the depth of the prim waterproof, "and were so thankful to see your light, Major Gascoigne. I declare, when it came in sight I said a little prayer."

"I'm glad you managed to make me out," was his mendacious reply. "Let me introduce Miss Gascoigne, my cousin," indicating Angel; "she will look after you. Angel, this is Mrs. Flant and her sister, Miss Ball. I leave them in your hands, whilst I see about their coolies and dinner."

"How cosy," said Mrs. Flant, "how—ah"—searching for an adjective—"comfortable you are."

"Yes, a charming little—hiding-place, an ideal retreat," echoed her sister, with peculiar significance.

"Is it not?" assented Angel, hastily gathering up the cards, and putting away the mandoline, whilst the weather-beaten, hungry women devoured her with their eyes.

A graceful, willow-like figure, light brown hair, dressed by a maid; a pretty face and such lovely clothes, a French gown, turquoise ornaments, a vague sniff of violets—an up-to-date young lady, with a pair of extremely penetrating dark blue eyes, and a self-possession that was at once colossal and superb.

"Do let me help you—I can lend you some dry

things," she said, ushering them into her bedroom, already made comfortable.

On the dressing-table her silver-backed brushes and mirrors were arranged, her scent-bottles, books, dressing-gown, and slippers, all indicated the bower of a dainty and somewhat extravagant occupant. Angel gave practical assistance. She lent her dressing-gown and tea-jacket—her shoes were, unfortunately, too small—she assisted her visitors to remove their dripping garments, summoned the ayah, gave her voluble directions, and took her departure.

The bearer, who was now positively at his wits' end with three ladies to provide for—as well as all their retinue to house—was almost in despair. However, he provided soup, a stew, and anchovy toast. Meanwhile the new arrivals conferred together in hissing whispers.

"Well," said Mrs. Flant, "I would not have believed it. I'll never trust a man again."

To which announcement her sister replied with a snort:

"Yes; and, of all people, Major Gascoigne—a sort of monk, whom all the world believes to be a hard-working recluse, and to only tolerate women when he comes down to Marwar. That he should have—this person—hidden away——"

"Well, we must just put a good face on it," said Mrs. Flant philosophically, "and be civil—any port in a storm, you know."

"Did you notice her gown?" said her sister, speaking, as it were, in italics. "It must have cost a

fortune—simple—yet so French; and look at her dressing-case,” and Miss Ball cast up her eyes in pious horror.

After the ladies had reappeared in the “person’s” garments, refreshments were brought in, to which they paid serious attention. They partook of whiskies and sodas, began to recover from their fright and their astonishment, and found their tongues.

“You never saw anything like the road between this and Shiram’s,” remarked Mrs. Flant.

“Oh, I think I can imagine it,” replied Angel, “as I came over part of that way this morning.”

“You? Not really?” in an incredulous key.

“Yes, I only arrived a few hours before you”—the girl was obviously speaking the truth; she was a lady—“I came out in the *Arabia* on Monday.”

“Then the Mactears were on board?” with a judicial air.

“Yes, they were in the next cabin to us—to the friend I came out with.”

“I’m afraid you won’t have a favourable first impression of India,” said Miss Ball.

“Oh, but I was born here. I was in India till I was nine years old. Philip is my guardian, you know,” and then she laughed, as she added, “We have all taken him by storm to-day.”

“But you were expected, surely?”

“No—no more than you were.”

“We never heard that Major Gascoigne had a ward,” remarked Miss Brewer, trenchantly.

“If you had been in Ramghur nine years ago, you would have heard all about me. Here he comes,” as

Philip entered and beheld the ladies cheered and clothed, and in a right state of mind. Evidently they were getting on capitally with Angela, and this was important, though she was too simple to guess at her guardian's reason for being particularly civil to his guests. Mrs. Flant had a sharp tongue; she lived in his station, knew all his friends, and was capable of making a very fine story out of this evening's *rencontre*. Angel rather wondered at her cousin's affability, and how well he talked. After a while he said:

"You three ladies had better turn in soon, as you'll have a long day to-morrow; you will have to share the same room," he explained, "and to rough it a good deal, I'm afraid."

"Not half as much as you in a wet tent," cried Angela.

"Oh, I'm all right. To-morrow," addressing himself to Mrs. Flant, "I will do my best to get you on down to Khartgodam."

"You are so anxious to be rid of us," cried Miss Brewer, coquettish, in Angel's charming tea-jacket with its faint perfume of lilac.

"Oh, no, not at all, but my cousin is most anxious to get down to Mrs. Gordon."

"Oh, do *you* know Mrs. Gordon?"

"She has known her since she was a child," replied Major Gascoigne. Angel sat by and marvelled. "I will accompany you myself, and put you across the bad bits. But I cannot get leave—in fact, I would not take it, the district is in such an awful condition, and I shall be obliged if you will take charge of my cousin, and hand her over to Mrs. Gordon."

"Oh, we shall be only too delighted," said Mrs. Flant. "It will be so nice all travelling together. It was quite providential our finding the bungalow."

"For me also," he replied. "I was just wondering how Angel really was to travel, and your turning up here is a piece of wonderful good luck."

Angel opened her eyes to their widest extent. Was her guardian an accomplished hypocrite? His countenance, when he had descried those two white faces peering in at the window, had expressed amazement, horror, and disgust.

CHAPTER XIX

THE PARTING GUESTS

THE morning succeeding the arrivals, and the storm, was cloudless. There are few things more beautiful, or more treacherous, than a break in the rains in the Himalayas. The sun shone brilliantly, the sky was a dense turquoise blue, against which stood out a far-away range of jagged white peaks. A stillness lay upon the deep, dim valleys beneath the forest bungalow, there was scarcely a sound besides the twitter of birds, and the thunder of a water-course.

Miss Ball was standing in the verandah pulling on her gloves, and contemplating the scene. The party were on the eve of departure.

"What a delicious spot this is," she exclaimed, rapturously, to Major Gascoigne; "isn't it perfectly lovely, Bella? I should like to come here for my honeymoon."

"You must first get hold of the bridegroom," declared her sister in a tart voice. Fanny's disappointments had begun to have a wearing effect upon that lady's patience, and this early start, and the natural apprehension of a detestable, if not dangerous journey, had somewhat darkened her outlook on life.

"The bungalow is always at Miss Ball's disposal," replied the host gallantly. "And now we must be getting under weigh, as we have a long march before us."

In ten minutes the verandah was empty, the last coolie had disappeared among the trees, Abdul, the Khansamah, free from further anxieties, retired to his charpoy, and his huka. It proved to be a day of thrilling adventures, of almost hair-breadth escapes. Mrs. Flant emphatically declared that she could not face certain obstacles, but she managed to progress, thanks to her escort's cool determination, and ruthlessly deaf ear to her agonised exclamations. Miss Ball, on the back of a stalwart hill-man, cut a sufficiently ridiculous figure; she had not the nerve to skirt a certain frowning precipice on her own feet. The path was narrow, the drop apparently fathomless, her fears and protestations entailed twenty minutes' delay. She angrily refused to follow her sister's example to be led across blindfolded by Gascoigne, she simply sat in her jampan (hill-chair), and there lifted up her voice and wept.

Whatever Major Gascoigne's mental remarks were, outwardly, he was the personification of politeness, encouragement, and cajolery. At last the lady was persuaded, and was hoisted on the back of a grunting Pahari with the shoulders of an Atlas, and with her eyelids squeezed tightly together, her long feet dangling helplessly, was safely borne to the other side. Thus she got across one of the "bad bits." Whatever obstacles they encountered, their leader never flinched. He worked hard in his shirt sleeves, with his own hands; he led, decoyed, and coaxed the two sisters and the ayah along crumbling tracks, over water-courses, and from rock to rock amid boiling torrents. It was the hardest day's

work that he ever remembered. If a fourth clinging coward had been on his hands, Gascoigne felt that he was bound to succumb. But Angel, luckily for him, had no fear. She was blessed with a wonderful head and a cool courage, was amazingly active, and swung herself from rock to rock, from root to root, or walked along a six-inch path precisely as if she were a Pahari maiden. Her guardian's time being engrossed with repairs, enticements, and the charge of three agonised companions, he had but scant opportunity of talking to her; but once, when the worst part of the journey was behind them, the ladies were ahead in their jampans, the two fell into one another's society, as they passed through a forest of rhododendrons.

"Well—that's over!" said Gascoigne, as he drew a long breath, took off his hat, and mopped his head with his handkerchief.

"You won't offer to be squire of dames again in a hurry?" said Angel, with a mischievous laugh. "I never saw such cowards. They were as bad as the ayah—they gibbered."

"I suppose it's constitutional," he replied; "they could not help their feelings."

"At least they might have concealed them," rejoined the girl, indignantly.

"Do you always conceal yours, Angel?"

"I do my best—I'm trying hard; I can with some things," she answered, "and if I were afraid, I'd rather die than show it."

"I am quite certain of that," he replied, "but you have a stout heart, I cannot fancy your being afraid

of anything. I've a letter here for Mrs. Gordon—will you give it to her? It will explain——” he hesitated.

“—*me*,” she supplemented briskly.

“Yes, she will be delighted to have you. She is very much alone, her husband is absorbed in his work—and they have no children.”

“Is she nice?” inquired his companion.

“She is one of the best women I've ever known.”

“Yet she may be extremely disagreeable,” argued Angela.

No, she is charming, and so popular. She is sympathetic, clear-headed, and practical—everyone takes their troubles to Mrs. Gordon.”

“And you are sending her your trouble by rail?”

“Nonsense, Angel, she will look upon you as a great boon, and be infinitely obliged to me. I am sure you will like her.”

“Why should you be sure?” she protested; “sometimes I like the people I ought not to like, and don't like the people I ought to like—and there is no dependence on me.”

“What a way to talk,” he exclaimed. “It will be strange if you and Mrs. Gordon don't hit it off.”

“Do you think I shall shock her—as I do you?”

“I was not aware that I was shocked. She is a good woman, who is not narrow-minded, and her friends are many and various. Lucky is the young man or girl, who, on first coming out, falls into her sphere. There are very few people who have not been the better for Mrs. Gordon's influence.”

“And yet she cannot influence her own husband,” remarked Angel drily. “He is still a bear.”

"Unfortunately he is—and a grizzly bear at that," admitted Gascoigne. "He has no interest in life beyond his work, which includes personal ambition, a certain class of Persian love-songs—and perhaps—his liver."

"What a mixture!" she ejaculated. "Well, I shall insist on his taking an interest in *me*, and before long, you will hear of his spouting Persian love-songs, as we stroll up and down among roses, and bul-buls."

Gascoigne burst into a loud, involuntary laugh, as the incongruous picture tickled his imagination. His laugh rang down through the forest trees, and reached the ladies, who looked at one another with peculiar significance.

"Oh, yes," resumed Angel, "I intend to influence *ursa* Major; through him I shall influence his wife; through her, I shall influence the whole province. I shall be like a pebble thrown into a pool, whose ripples go far;" then in a voice, "When shall you be down, Philip?"

"In three weeks or a month, and meanwhile I know, Angel, you will be happy with Mrs. Gordon; she will introduce you to the people—and show you the ropes."

"Oh, but I know the ropes," said Angel, kicking a pine cone before her, "I've not forgotten my India. Kind, hospitable, intimate old India, with your mysterious under life, your tragedies, and comedies, and scandals. I love you still," and she paused for a moment to kiss her hand to a distant peep of the far-away blue plains. "Can anything be more exquisite than this view?" she continued. "Look at

the ferns and moss growing on the trees, the carpets of wild orchids, the stern purple mountains; I should like to remain in these hills—they seem to draw me to them. I was born in the Himalayas, you know. Well, I suppose I must leave them,” and she heaved a sigh. “It is a pity, for I feel as if I could be so *good* up here.”

“I trust that you can be good anywhere?” said Gascoigne.

“Oh, I don’t know,” she rejoined. “I am so sensitive to climate. I love the sunshine, it makes me good-natured and generous, but I always feel so wicked in an east wind! As for my sensations in a stuffy, three-berth cabin, with two sea-sick companions—but I spare you. By the way, one of my fellow-sufferers, a Mrs. Farquhar, gave me an urgent invitation to visit her at Umballa.”

Gascoigne most devoutly wished that Angel had accepted this offer, and thus given him even a few days’ breathing-space.

He looked at his ward, as she walked lightly beside him. She was so natural, so simple, yet so worldly wise; and she was distractingly pretty—not many men would have been so painfully anxious to rid themselves of such a companion.

She would certainly turn the heads of all the young fellows in Marwar. What a prospect for him! Already he beheld himself at a wedding, giving away the hand of the most lovely bride. Yes, of course, it would not be long before Angel was carried off; she was a girl of unusual attractions, and with this hope in his heart he became quite hilarious. She would make a far happier marriage

under his and Mrs. Gordon's auspices than under that of her heartless and worldly old grandmother.

On second thoughts, Major Gascoigne accompanied the party the whole way to the railway, and saw them off, although it entailed an immense ride afterwards.

He wished to despatch a long explanatory wire to Mrs. Gordon, so that Angel might not burst upon her as she had done on him; nor need the child have all the awkwardness of announcing herself, and producing her credentials. He secured tickets, saw to refreshments, baggage, servants, and then came the taking leave of the three ladies. Angel had half expected him to kiss her, but he merely gave her a warm handshake. He was very funny now, so odd, and stiff, and changed, yet just the same dear old Philip. And thus Angel set off in the little tin-pot railway to Marwar, where she was to live under Mrs. Gordon's chaperonage, turn the heads of all the young men, and to meet her fate. As Philip turned his hired pony once more towards the hill, and a thirty-five mile ride, leaving his own steed to follow, his thoughts accompanied a party in the little black train now panting through the Terai.

And as he regained, late at night, his now deserted bungalow, his thoughts dwelt, as he smoked, over the extraordinary incidents of the last twenty-four to thirty hours. What experiences had been compassed into them, like a meat-lozenge of emotions.

As in his mind's eye, her guardian again beheld that charming child flitting about his room; remembered her speaking and sunny eyes, he told himself

that his ward had far surpassed his expectations. Surpassed?—his expectations had never ventured upon such an ideal, and he made up his mind that he would be extremely difficult to please, as her guardian, and that it was only some real good fellow who would have his consent to marry Angel. Then he set his memory to work. He deliberately passed all his friends, and his acquaintances, in critical review—no, there was not one of them worthy to dust her shoes!

CHAPTER XX

A DESTROYING ANGEL

CAPTAIN SHAFTO was taking tea with Mrs. Gordon in the great important looking drawing-room, which befitted the wife of a Commissioner, and future Lieutenant-Governor. She was, although five-and-thirty, a strikingly attractive woman, with sweet dark eyes, a sympathetic voice, a graceful carriage, and supreme tact. On the other hand, Billy Shafto's beauty had been somewhat tarnished by several bad "go's" of fever, a series of hot seasons in the plains, and roughing it on an Afghan campaign, but he was still good-looking, popular, and unmarried. As his hostess was about to add sugar to his tea, a telegram was brought to her by a scarlet chuprassi, and presented with a deep salaam.

She picked it carelessly off the salver, and, glancing at it, said, "It is probably from Donald to say he cannot be home till to-morrow—the new assessment is so tedious." But as she read the telegram she gave a little gasp, and said, "From Major Gascoigne. You"—and she looked at it again — "will never guess what it's about."

"Of course I can," replied Shafto with the utmost confidence; "he is going to be married, though I'm blessed if I can guess to whom—everyone tells you first, you are the Queen of Matchmakers, and the universal confidante—yes, poor Phil, gone at last."

"No, you are quite cold—try again," she said.

"Again——" he repeated, and his eyes travelled thoughtfully round the pillared room, with its immense palms, imposing mirrors, and ottomans, an awe-inspiring official room, offering dim suggestions of future receptions.

"I give it up—stop, no I don't," and he slapped his knee, "it's about *Angel*."

"Yes, you are wonderfully quick, I must say, but why did you think of her?"

"I always knew she'd give him trouble yet."

"I don't know about the trouble, but she has joined him in the hills without a moment's notice."

Shafto gave a loud laugh. "That's Angel all the world over! I was always dead against Phil taking over charge of that girl. I knew he'd be let in. Here she comes out, I'll venture to say, as wild and unmanageable as ever. What the dickens is he going to do with her?"

"Well, for the present," said Mrs. Gordon with a faint smile, "he is sending her down to *me*. I dare-say, ultimately, he will arrange for her return to England."

"From what I remember of Angel I fancy there will be two words to that. He might place her with some family; there are no end of girls out here now, as paying guests—but it's a day after the fair. As long as she is unmarried, he will be in hot water. You never know where you are with Angel, or where she will have you."

"You seem to have a bad opinion of her, poor girl," remarked the lady.

"Well, yes—and with good reason. What does Phil say?"

“‘Angela arrived yesterday unexpectedly. Am sending her to you by four o’clock train. Please meet, and receive her, and pardon P. G.’”

“Umph,” muttered Shafto, as he folded up the telegram, “she will be here at ten to-morrow. Shall I meet her and bring her up? I knew her in pinafores.”

“Thank you so much, for Donald expects me to be at breakfast. I will send down the carriage and a chuprassi, and have the room all ready.”

“I wonder what she will be like?” said the man with a meditative air.

“A little creature with fluffy hair—rather silent and frightened,” suggested the lady; and as Shafto always received whatever Mrs. Gordon said as gospel, he was searching for the counterpart of this description in the morning train. Mrs. Flant and her sister greeted him agreeably, and he explained that he had not come to meet them—but that Mrs. Gordon had sent him to receive a friend.

“Perhaps I am the individual,” suggested a tall, striking-looking pretty girl; “is her name Gascoigne?”

“You don’t mean to say that you are Angel?” he exclaimed, grasping her hand; “I never would have known you.”

“No,” rather drily, “but I recognise you. You are Captain Shafto.” He coloured with pleasure, till she added, “who always so strongly disapproved of me.”

“Now, there your excellent memory is at fault,” was his mendacious reply, “who could ever have disapproved of *you*?” for he had fallen in love with

this smiling vision on the spot. "Let me get your luggage out—I suppose your ayah is somewhere—the carriage is here," and he bustled about, proud and important, and all the way back to the Commissioner's, as they sat opposite to one another in the roomy landau, Shafto the Scornor was feverishly endeavoring to win the smiles and good will of this exquisite and rather disdainful Angel. He was her first victim—and by no means the last.

Mrs. Gordon welcomed the traveller warmly, kissed her, took her to her best guest chamber, and sent her in a *recherché* breakfast.

Meanwhile she read the epistle that was, so to speak, Angel's letter of credit. So she had escaped from her grandmother, and all the stimulating froth of modern society, and cast herself into the arms of her guardian. Poor, poor Philip! never a ladies' man—though many women found him most interesting and attractive—what was he to do, with this wild and beautiful ward?

* * * * *

In a surprisingly short time Miss Gascoigne had made her presence felt in Marwar. Mrs. Gordon had submitted to be enslaved; her stolid, self-engrossed husband had expressed his admiration, Shafto was her bond servant, and within a week Mrs. Gordon, popular Mrs. Gordon, had never remembered in all her experience such a rush of young men's cards and calls. Angel had unpacked her pretty toilettes—toilettes that threw her mother's home-made costumes completely into the shade—which she wore with an everyday grace. Lovely, fascinating, maddening, was the station verdict, as

they saw the girl in carriage, or on horseback; such a creature had not adorned for twenty years, and oh! what a charge for Philip Gascoigne. Meanwhile Angel revived old memories, captured the affections of Mrs. Gordon, threw out many queries respecting Philip, and embarked on a series of flirtations.

Mrs. Flant and Miss Ball at first posed to the station as her original friends and sponsors. They were important on the subject; she had been given into their care by Major Gascoigne, and it was with them that she had travelled from Khartgodam. She was a delightful companion, so amusing and so vivacious. But as days flew by a change came o'er the spirit of their dream, for among the crowd who had flocked to Angela's standard was a certain Mr. Tarletan in the D. P. W., who had sworn, or, at least whispered, allegiance to Fanny Ball. This put a completely new complexion on Angela's character. Miss Ball was some years over thirty, a slender young woman, whose admirers and good looks were visibly deserting her, and her sister was painfully anxious to see Fanny settled. Fanny had been foolish, and let so many good chances slip through her fingers; Mr. Tarletan represented the last of these; it was really a most serious matter. He had been asked to the house, lavishly entertained, and taken out to dances; he had spent a whole expensive month with the Flants in the hills, on the strength of his attentions: did the man suppose he was going to get out of that for *nothing*? But this mean-spirited miscreant ignored all bonds and claims, and prostrated himself at the feet of the

adorable Angel. His greetings to Mrs. Flant were offhand and brief, his answers to her questions curt, his pressing engagements fictional. As he had seven hundred rupees a month, and good prospects, Mrs. Flant was not going to suffer him to escape; she accordingly turned to her most seasoned and formidable weapon—her tongue.

As soon as Mrs. Flant began to “talk” there were whispers; hitherto there were no two male opinions respecting Miss Gascoigne’s beauty, her figure, her vivacity, her charm—now there were no two female opinions respecting her—reputation. Mrs. Scott had requested Mrs. Gordon in a peculiarly pointed manner, not to bring Miss Gascoigne to her dance, and Mrs. Gordon had replied with stately emphasis: “Certainly not, and I shall remain at home with my guest.” Then Mrs. Scott had grown pink, red, scarlet—a Commissioner’s wife is a dangerous woman to snub (in India), and Mrs. Gordon was the wife of a Commissioner. “Of course you are the last to hear the station scandal,” she burst out, “and there is such a thing as being too charitable. You don’t know what people are saying about Philip Gascoigne and his—ward.”

“You need not hesitate. She is his ward—what more?”

“When Mrs. Flant discovered——”

“Oh, Mrs. Flant is a Christopher Columbus for—new scandals and mare’s nests.”

“Well, at any rate, she surprised Major Gascoigne and his ward in a lonely bungalow in the hills, perfectly happy and at home together. She says she believes they were there for weeks.”

"And even so?"

"Mrs. Gordon," rising and evidently preparing to shake the dust off her feet, "if you had young people—you would never be so lax. Miss Gascoigne is pretty in a certain odd French style—she is grown up, and what is Major Gascoigne?"

"Her guardian—her mother——"

"No," interrupting wildly; "an attractive bachelor in the prime of life—many people consider him the handsomest man in the station."

"But what has that got to do with the question?"

"Oh, my dear Mrs. Gordon!" Here Mrs. Scott shrugged her shoulders, and with a dramatic "Good afternoon," stalked out of the great drawing-room. It was in the air, and in people's eyes. Mrs. Gordon felt it, and saw it, although Angel at her side, all white muslin, and smiles, was as innocent as any May-day lamb, who fails to see in the approaching figure in a blue overall—the arbiter of its fate.

* * * * *

Whilst the station was simmering to boiling-point, Major Gascoigne returned to Marwar, and dined at the Gordons' on the night of his arrival. He arrived late, just in time to take his partner in to dinner; it was not a so-called "Burra Khana," but merely a friendly informal affair, half-a-dozen of the station boys, a couple "passing through," Angel, and himself. As for Angel, it seemed to him that his prognostications had been fulfilled. She looked brilliantly lovely, yes, that was the adjective, her colour was like a rose, her eyes shone. She carried herself with an air, though she chattered any quantity of fascinating nonsense. She was irresistible, and all the

boys bowed down before her, like the sheaves of Joseph's brethren.

He thought Mrs. Gordon looked a little worn and anxious, possibly her Indian bear had been unusually selfish and savage. Poor woman, when she married Gordon twelve years previously, a pretty, simple country clergyman's daughter, longing to see the East, and strongly recommended to the bear by his maiden aunts—he had come home to look for a wife precisely as he would for a camera or a bicycle—she little dreamt of the life that she was doomed to live, the stones for bread, the serpents for fish, and yet how she kept her sorrows to herself, what reticence, self-control, and womanly dignity; who ever heard her complain of a hard taskmaster, his iron rule, and her barren life?

After dinner Angel sang; it seemed to be expected as part of the evening's entertainment. Major Gascoigne leant against the wall in the background, and marvelled and listened. She stood behind her accompanist and facing the room, and when Angel opened her mouth to sing she still continued to look charming. She wore a white dress trimmed with shining silver, it had a low neck and long sleeves, according to the fashion; a few crimson roses were fastened in the bodice, a little chain and locket encircled her long throat; the expression of her eyes was interesting to watch—what passion lay dormant in those deep blue orbs—who would be the happy man on whom they would ultimately smile? There was no question that his ward possessed the fatal gift, and he could hardly realise that this charming, enchanting and destroying Angel was the little for-

lorn creature whom he had educated and befriended. He thought of her grandmother's furious letter, which had swiftly followed on the runaway; it was evidently written when the heart of the writer was hot within her. It said, "Angel is her mother's own daughter, though I was never brought into personal contact with that adventuress, who robbed me of my youngest son. It was about this woman that we quarrelled, her daughter and I; in a fury she left me, and fled to you; regardless of appearances, duty, or gratitude. I wash my hands of her absolutely, and I deplore your fate."

When the party was breaking up, Philip Gascoigne snatched a few words with his ward, who was closely invested by her admirers. They were planning a riding party for the following morning; any number of perfect horses were preferred for her selection, her usual mount being lame.

"I will send over a pretty little Arab, that will carry you perfectly," suggested her guardian.

"Thank you very much, Philip, but I've almost decided to ride Captain de Horsay's polo pony, who can't bear women, and shies when he sees one—riding him will be an experience."

"You may say so," put in Captain de Horsay's rival, "much better ride my stud bred—you'll never hold him."

"Well, I shall try, and if he bolts, he can boast that he ran away with a lady, and his character as a woman-hater will be gone. Yes, please, Captain de Horsay, I'll have Schopenhauer at half-past six."

The riding party, which consisted of Mrs. Gordon, Angel, Philip, and four men, duly came off,

and though Schopenhauer ran away with the lady, she thought it great fun, but the pony's excitability and eccentricities precluded all chance of enjoying a comfortable *tête-à-tête* with anyone. She was, however, an admirable horsewoman, whatever her driving might be, and the black pony had undoubtedly met his match. Gascoigne took leave of the party outside the Commissioner's bungalow, and galloped straight home. As he entered his cool sitting-room, he was rather surprised to discover the station chaplain occupying his own especial arm-chair.

CHAPTER XXI

"THINK IT OVER"

THE Reverend Arthur Eliot, "Padre Eliot," as his people called him, was a notable figure in society, an active, well-built man of six or seven and thirty, with a square, clean-shaven face and an exceedingly sweet smile. He never preached longer than fifteen minutes, he was an admirable bowler, played a hard set of tennis and sang a good song. All this went far to account for his popularity. He was also unmarried—though this in India is unimportant—but, more than all, he was a fearless, outspoken pastor, whose example and works did far more good amongst his flock, especially the young men, than constant services and ornate ritual.

He worked indefatigably among the soldiers and Eurasians, their wives and children, and strove to provide occupation and amusement for them all, fully endorsing Dr. Watt's opinion respecting "Satan and idle hands." In sickness and in health it was the Padre they all turned to, and many a poor soul had leaned on his arm, as it groped its way to another world. He lived plainly and simply in a little cheap bungalow, and was a near neighbour to Major Gascoigne, between whom and himself there existed a most cordial friendship. The Padre was such a busy man that Gascoigne knew, the instant he saw him, that only important business had brought him to call in the golden hours of the morning.

"Hullo, Gascoigne," he said cheerily, as he entered, "I am glad to see you back."

"Yes, thank you, only arrived last night. I've had a tremendously big job up the hills—they all seemed determined to run down into the plains; I never remember such rains," and he threw himself into a chair, and tossed his cap on the table.

"And now you are home for good," said the Padre, and his face took a more serious expression, as he sat erect and crumpled his terai hat in his vigorous hands.

"Look here, Gascoigne," he continued with an effort, "I've come to have a good square jaw with you, about something that will be disagreeable, but you know it's the Padre's duty to stand in the forefront, when talking has to be done."

"I know," assented his companion. "I suppose you want me to take back Johnson, the overseer—I honestly would if I could—I'm sorry for his family—I've given him two chances."

"My dear fellow," interrupted the chaplain, stretching out his hand, "it is not that at all. I've come to speak to you about Miss Gascoigne, your ward."

"What about Miss Gascoigne?" inquired her cousin. His manner stiffened, and his voice assumed an Arctic coolness.

"I suppose you know how a station gossips—in the billiard-room, barracks, and bazaar?"

"I suppose I do," he said contemptuously.

"Have you any notion of the talk there has been respecting Miss Gascoigne?"

"Every new-comer has to pass through that or-

deal—by tongue,” interrupted the other man with a gesture of impatience.

“Please allow me to finish,” protested his friend gravely. “Of course you are not likely to hear a breath—no one would venture to tell you; but the air is thick with rumours concerning your cousin and yourself.”

“And where do I come in?” he asked sharply, “in what character?”

“The usual character a man assumes when a very pretty woman is in question—the *rôle* of lover.”

Gascoigne kicked over a footstool, and rose to his feet. He had grown suddenly white.

“Who dares to couple our names in that way?” he asked hoarsely. The veins in his temples swelled, and his eyes flashed.

“Most people,” was the staggering reply; “you see, you and she were alone at your forest bungalow. Mrs. Flant has been drawing a highly-coloured picture of your *ménage*—she has thrown out hints.”

“To which no one who knows her will listen,” broke in Gascoigne.

“Oh, yes, I regret to say, that there is a large class who like to hear ill-doings attributed to others—especially when those others have been *sans peur*, and *sans reproche*.”

Gascoigne stared at the Padre for some seconds. At last he spoke. “I’ll tell you the plain facts, Eliot. Ten years ago I adopted my little cousin, and took over the charge from her dying mother. I sent the child to England and educated her; latterly her grandmother has given her a home. They have had a violent quarrel, and the impulsive girl came

straight off to me. She arrived exactly two hours before Mrs. Flant and her sister. I need scarcely say that her unexpected descent embarrassed me a good deal. That's the whole affair—I know it is unnecessary to explain myself to you”——

“Quite,” was the laconic reply, “but you are in an awkward position, as guardian to a young lady; and one of such a remarkable and out of the common character. When you accepted the post she was a child—now you have a beautiful woman on your hands. You are a young man, and unmarried. This gives the enemy occasion to blaspheme.”

Gascoigne muttered something which is absolutely unsuitable for print. Aloud he said, “I wish I were seventy years of age. I suppose that would shut people's mouths?”

“It would simplify matters, certainly,” acquiesced the Padre. “Miss Gascoigne did an extraordinarily foolish thing when she rushed out to India and hurled herself into your charge. She never realised the gravity of the step she was taking. I gather that she is a girl to act first, and then to sit down and think? In the present instance she will have to sit down and repent in sackcloth and ashes for the injury she has done to herself—and you.”

“Oh, never mind me,” broke in his companion impatiently, “what is to be done about her? I cannot offer her a home here—I cannot leave her with the Gordons—I have promised not to send her back to England—what *am* I to do?” and Gascoigne, who had been pacing the room with his hands behind his back, suddenly came to a halt, directly in front of his pastor.

“Why cannot you have her to live here?” asked Mr. Eliot, gravely.

“Why?” echoed the other man, “good Lord—is not your visit a plain answer to the question? If people are such brutes as to make a scandal out of—”

Mr. Eliot extended his hand with a gesture of deprecation.

“Oh, then, go on,” said Gascoigne impatiently; “tell me what I can do? Say the word.”

“You can—marry her,” was the totally unexpected answer.

Gascoigne’s reply was equally astonishing; it took the form of a long pause, and then a loud derisive laugh. “I—marry Angel!” he cried at last. “Excuse me, but the idea is too absurd.”

“I fail to see anything ridiculous about it,” rejoined the Padre. “I think it would be a capital match. You are a man in the prime of life, she is a charming girl—is there any just cause or impediment?”

“Twenty.”

“Give me one, then,” he asked impatiently.

“She is a mere child.”

“No; she is a grown-up woman.”

“We—would be a most incongruous couple, a butterfly, and a black working ant.”

“I cannot see that.”

“Besides, Angel is not to be disposed of in such a summary fashion; she would laugh at the bare idea.”

“Is she not well disposed to you?” and Padre Eliot eyed him searchingly.

"Oh, yes; as a child she was extremely fond of me."

"*'On revient toujours à ses premiers amours.'*" quoted his visitor with significance.

"Eliot, you are a clever fellow, and my friend," said Gascoigne, suddenly, "but you are neither going to talk me, or quote me, into matrimony. I have never—that is to say, not for years—thought of marrying."

"Then it is time you did," rejoined his visitor, with decision. "It is a great mistake for a man to put off marrying too long; marriage is an honourable estate. It is not good for man to live alone."

"Well, I find the estate extremely comfortable. There was peace in Eden till Eve appeared, and I, too, can quote scripture, 'Physician, heal *thyself*.'"

"Yes, I thought you knew," and Mr. Eliot's face grew grave; "I've had my romance—she died."

Gascoigne did not reply.

"I've had my romance—she jilted me," he merely said.

"I did not know."

"Pardon me, I'm sorry for you; but marriage would change the whole current of my life."

"And make it deeper and broader and more unselfish," suggested his visitor.

"I never realised that I was selfish—I expect I am! I like my own way, my own pursuits, my own friends. I would be selfish, indeed, if I brought a gay young life to share my fossilised routine. Eliot," he continued, still more forcibly, "speaking as man to man, surely there is some way of escape from this situation? Help me, for my mind is not

fruitful in devices. I am thinking of Angel, not of myself. Is she to be compelled to marry a man she has always looked on as a sort of uncle, simply because a wicked woman has started an infernal scandal? What is your opinion?”

“You have already had it,” now rising. “I have told you what I came here to say. Scandal is hard to stifle, even when it has not a tittle of foundation—evil minds continue to repeat. ‘There is no smoke without a fire.’ I believe there is no fire, nothing but the cold, wet sticks of early companionship. I say, that I know you to be a good fellow, Gascoigne; Miss Angel is a beautiful, high-spirited, warm-hearted girl. Accept what fate sends you—marry her if you can, and be thankful.”

“That is your last word?”

“Yes; I say no more. Think it over, my dear fellow,” and here he laid his hand affectionately on the shoulder of his friend; “you might see Mrs. Gordon. Women are instinctively clever and quick-witted in these affairs. Think it over,” and with this injunction Mr. Eliot put his terai hat on his head, and hastily took his departure.

* * * * *

For some time after the Padre had left him, Major Gascoigne remained sitting in a chair, mentally benumbed. By-and-by he roused himself with an effort, and set all his wits to work upon the subject so brusquely brought to his knowledge. The more he reviewed the question, the less he liked it. He knew how a breath of gossip can tarnish a stainless name, whether at home or abroad; how no amount of rubbing will remove the speck of rust

which eats it away. Poor Eliot, he was sorry he had raked up a dead memory. Eliot was too emotional, too sensitive about his flock, very easily frightened—and all parsons were match-makers. There must be *some* way out of the wood. He would change his clothes at once, swallow some breakfast, and ride over and talk the thing out with Mrs. Gordon. She was generally sewing or writing all the morning in the north verandah. Then he suddenly recalled the fact that his hostess had seemed a little grave and preoccupied the previous evening; that once or twice he had caught her gazing at him with a mysterious expression—that once or twice she had been about to say something to him during the morning ride, and paused; and that she had given him an unusually pressing invitation to “come over soon—and tell her all the news.”

Major Gascoigne was perfectly correct in his surmise. As he walked up to the north verandah, Mrs. Gordon rose, and held out her hand; in the other were several letters.

“Do come and sit down,” she said. “You are the very person I was thinking about, and particularly wish to see.” As she concluded she held up a letter, and said: “This is *all* about you.”

“Then it is bound to be stupid,” he rejoined, heaving a dog out of a chair, and taking its place. “I’ve come over to have a talk with you—great wits, you see, jump together; but, bar all jokes, I shall be glad if your wit will clear up a puzzle for me.”

Mrs. Gordon looked at him inquiringly, and faintly coloured as she said:

“You have had a visit from Mr. Eliot, good, brave man.”

“Good, yes; but there was no particular question of courage,” said Major Gascoigne, rather sharply. “Did you fear I would knock him down, or shoot him?” and his tone was sarcastic.

“I’m thinking of moral courage,” she answered quickly. “It required a certain amount to go and beard you—and tell you—that you had been tried by the tribunal of the station and sentenced to—marry——”

“Angel,” he supplemented, half under his breath.

“Yes, it appears that Mrs. Flant has been assiduously spreading reports,” continued his companion, “and nothing will appease Mrs. Grundy—short of—your marriage.”

“And is it not shameful?” he broke out, with a ring of passion in his voice, “that I should have to marry that poor child, in order to shut Mrs. Flant’s mouth?”

“To shut everyone’s mouth,” corrected Mrs. Gordon; “even Donald says it is desirable. Mrs. Flant has the pen of a ready writer, as well as hosts of correspondents—she has a hideous mind, and, you see, you were promoted over her brother’s head.”

“Simply because he was incompetent. An unmitigated duffer—his work was notorious. I’m still patching and repairing and destroying.”

“I always thought it was a hazardous experiment, your taking charge of Angel,” observed Mrs. Gordon, as she meditatively surveyed her visitor.

What a handsome fellow he was! with his sun-bronzed, clear-cut face—at present clouded with

gloom. What an excellent husband he would make; it was a pity he was unmarried, and only (she secretly felt assured) some extraordinarily tidal wave of circumstance such as the present, would ever sweep him into the net matrimonial. He would be so much happier with a wife. And Angel? With a woman's instinctive knowledge of another, Mrs. Gordon knew that Angel—beautiful, bewitching, fascinating Angel—loved no one as she did this good-looking, dark-eyed cousin, who lay back in his chair with his hands locked behind his head, his gaze riveted on his well-cut riding boots, and an expression of tragic protestation on his countenance.

Angel was not in love yet. She loved him (there is a difference)—she loved him as the champion of her childhood, the bond between her and her mother, her ideal, champion, and friend. This love was well hidden away from all unsympathetic eyes, for Angel had made no foolish boast, when she had declared that she would conceal her feelings, but the love, a rare, strong, pure love, was there.

Once or twice it had peeped out timidly, and Mrs. Gordon had seen it. She was a born match-maker; of her matches she was inordinately proud, and generally with good reason. She felt that she had contributed to the happiness of many, and that, just at the critical moment, she had supplied the little look, or hint, or word, that brought the whole story to a happy ending.

As she sat with her eyes fastened reflectively on her visitor, she rapidly made up her mind that he should marry Angel. The "talk" would eventually blow over; in fact, if she were to dress herself up as

a Japanese, or a negress, and go to the club, the talk would instantly be diverted to herself. So much for talk! Here was a tide in Philip's affairs and Angel's, and she resolved to take it at the flood.

“I think you and Angel would be an ideal couple,” she said. “I'm sure you would make her happy.”

“What!” he exclaimed, struggling back out of a day dream; “you are not in earnest?”

“You would be April and July.”

“No, but a March hare, and a Michaelmas goose,” he retorted, scornfully. “I'm much too old for her.”

Mrs. Gordon made no effort to combat this statement—her husband was seventeen years her senior. Was not her bleak married life an awful warning to other girls?

“She would have someone to lean on,” she resumed; “someone to guide her.”

“I'm not sure that she'd care about *that*,” her visitor protested, with a short laugh.

“She always—liked you—she likes you still. The king can do no wrong,” she urged, insistently.

“He would do her a great wrong if he asked her to be his queen to silence lying tongues. A gay young fellow of five-and-twenty, who dances well and is a good polo player, is far more in Angel's line than I am—even supposing she would have me—which she would not.” Here Mrs. Gordon made a gesture of dissent. “I'm too settled in my ways. After a man passes the twenties, and gets on into the thirties without marrying, he does not want a wife—she's a sort of extra.”

"What heresy," cried his listener, indignantly.

"Besides, you know, I—was once—in love with another girl."

"Oh, yes; but that was twelve years ago," said his listener, quickly; "she is no girl now. You cannot pretend you have not got over that. We all know that men's hearts, like crabs' claws, grow again."

"What heresy," he repeated, with a laugh; "but, come, Mrs. Gordon, let us be serious. Surely you can suggest some nice retired family in a hill station who would receive Angel? I'll allow her four hundred a year—a family with girls preferred."

"No," she replied; "for although Mrs. Flant's hints are abominable falsehoods, her lie has had three weeks' start. Whilst you have been absent it has been travelling rapidly, and growing like a snowball. How are you to overtake it? and what family of girls would receive a young woman—with a—story?" The lady's methods were cruel, but it was all for the good of the subject, and his ultimate happiness; the end justified the means. "Angela's name has been bandied about; you must change it from Miss to Mrs."

"I'll be——" he began, and pulled himself up. "I shall go straight off to Mrs. Flant, and cram her words down her throat, and make her eat them. If she were a man, I declare, I would flog her. What is her tale?"

"Merely a hill idyll—which she discovered one stormy evening."

"But Angel came out in the *Arabia*; she had only

the start of Mrs. Flant by about one hundred moments, and there are two hundred witnesses to prove it.”

“True, but if you make a stir, you stir up mud,” was Mrs. Gordon’s damping rejoinder. “You will make matters worse. At present, talk is confined within a certain limited radius; surely you don’t wish Angel to be the talk of India?”

Here came Angel running, in a flowing, white gown, with a note in her hand. She was accompanied by two frolicking puppies, and looked like the spirit of youth.

“Good morning again, Philip,” she said; then glancing at her friend, she continued, “I declare, you two are like a couple of conspirators—where is the dark lantern? Who is to be the victim?”

“You are,” was Mrs. Gordon’s unexpected reply. “We are meditating carrying you off into camp for six weeks.”

“How delightful—there’s nothing I shall enjoy so much. Are you going to invite Philip?” glancing at him.

“I don’t think I can get away,” he stammered—“at least, not for more than a couple of days at a time.”

“I always had an idea that there was next to no work in India; that it was all racing and polo, and dancing and flirting.”

“Well, my dear child, you see you were wrong,” said Mrs. Gordon. “Who is the note from, my dear?”

“Only a line from Miss Lennox, to say that she and her sister regret that they cannot come over to

have a game of tennis this evening—such a funny stiff little note,” and she tendered it to her hostess between two fingers, whilst Mrs. Gordon’s and Major Gascoigne’s eyes met in a glance of quick significance.

* * * * *

As Major Gascoigne was walking home across the parade-ground, a pony-carriage and pair of fat Pegu ponies drew up on the road, and awaited him. Then a lady’s head was poked out from under the hood, and a smiling face, crowned by an Ellwood helmet, said:

“So pleased to see you back again.”

“Thank you, Mrs. Wiggins,” he rejoined.

“I want to be the first to congratulate you on your beautiful cousin—she is lovely—everyone is talking of her, and no wonder. And when is it to be?”

“When is—what to be?” he asked stiffly.

“Oh, come, come, you need not play the ostrich with me,” and with a laugh and a flip at her ponies, the lady rattled rapidly away, and subsequently bragged of her encounter.

Angel’s guardian frequently visited to the Commissioner’s bungalow. He came to dine, to early tea, to ride, to accompany Angel and Mrs. Gordon to church or the band. Angel was radiantly happy, and, thanks to her friend’s precautions, totally unconscious of the net which was closing round herself and Philip. Mrs. Gordon was merely an interested looker-on, she saw both sides of the drama, she was both before and behind the scenes. On one side there was Major Gascoigne, restrained, reserved, reluctant, and yet who could resist the charm of the

daily companionship of the delightful girl who was his ward? There was Angel, whose whole mind seemed to be centred in the wish to please Philip—and to wonder what he thought of her?

Public opinion was favourable to the marriage—public opinion was strong. Those who envied Major Gascoigne his careless bachelor life, those who resented his lack of reciprocity, those mothers whom he had disappointed, all desired to hurry him to the altar.

He could resist, but he had decided not to resist, for, after all, Angel was the most beautiful and charming girl he knew. She was unspoiled, he believed that she cared for him, and that he could make her happy.

Under these reassuring reflections, he decided to accept his fate—Angel. It was not a hard fate, a fate much envied of many, and particularly—of all people—by Shafto. It was true that he had spoken of marriage as a mere “episode” in a man’s life—he trusted the opinion would never reach Angel’s ears. He was not madly, wildly, in love, no—but he thought he would be lucky if she became his wife.

He would prefer to remain unmarried for the next ten years, and carve out his career unweighted with an encumbrance. Truly, these were very cold-blooded ideas to be harboured by the lover of a bewitching beauty of nineteen. On the other hand, when he became grey, and stiff in the joints, and the meridian of life and its glories had waned, he would be nothing but a lonely, leather-faced veteran, with not a soul belonging to him, and with no one to whom he could leave his money, except Angel’s

children. Again the charm of his independent life rose into his vision, his happy, quiet hours, his beloved book, his absorbing interest for his work. Must this all be relinquished? Was it true, as a comrade had declared, that his heart was composed of an entrenchment tool? Swayed this way, and that, Philip was ashamed of his vacillation.

For once he found himself in strange conflict with his own character. The faculty of promptly making up his mind—what had become of it? Fresh from the charm of Angel's voice and manner, he determined to speak the very next day.

But when the morning came, the cool, clear morning, it brought counsel, it brought a multitude of papers that absorbed all his thoughts and time. After several hours of this detachment, his mind returned to the attitude of indecision, his ideas were again readjusted.

Whilst Philip was thus balancing his feeling and weighing the *pros* and *cons*, the Gordons went away into camp, for the Commissioner's usual cold weather tour, and they took Angel with them.

CHAPTER XXII

“A WHITE ELEPHANT AND A WHITE ROSE”

THE tour of a Commissioner in camp in the cold weather means a march from place to place, visiting certain villages and districts, holding official courts for the inhabitants, granting interviews, receiving petitions, looking into taxation and the working of the code, inspecting new works—such as canals and roads—and perhaps opening a local hospital, or attending some high native feast. The tour is intended to bring the great man into touch with the people. The camp is struck every morning soon after dawn, and the party ride on to the next encampment (there are invariably two sets of tents). Here they arrive in time for early breakfast, after which the chief transacts business, then comes the evening ride, a little shooting, a group round the log fire, and early to bed. Such is the usual programme, and as far as the working portion was concerned, an exact epitome of Mr. Gordon's routine, but he rarely went for an evening ride, and seldom joined his wife and her guest by the camp fire, and the two ladies appeared gracefully resigned to his desertion. Donald Gordon's manners were gruff, his conversation monosyllabic, his opinions startling; for instance, he had been heard to suggest the lethal chamber for half the women who were born! By a strange paradox, he burnt much midnight oil, writ-

ing his great Persian epic, in praise of the beautiful Shireen—Queen of Chosroes of the Golden Spears—and her lover, Ferhad the sculptor. But this streak of romance in his character never appeared in broad daylight; the midnight poet, with his rushing pen, his eyes aflame, one hand grasping his red, flowing beard, was by midday surly, hard-headed, rugged Donald Gordon, the clear-sighted, prompt, able administrator, who managed the great area over which he ruled, and his various collectors and subordinates, with amazing address; who said aloud things that others scarcely dared to whisper, was a pillar of the Empire, and a genius in his way.

Angel Gascoigne, who shared in all the pomp and circumstance of the Commissioner's semi-royal progress, enjoyed this, her first experience of a camp, most thoroughly. The life was interesting, it was novel, it never hasted, never rested—what more could any girl desire? The beautiful tract through which they passed, be it snipe district or tiger district, waving crops, or forest lands, impressed the new-comer with its free atmosphere, the Biblical simplicity of the lives of the people, odd bits of folklore, and the weird stories connected with their camping-grounds, each and all appealed to Angel's quick imagination. She and her hostess enjoyed many rides and walks, explorations, and *tête-à-tête* discussions, though occasionally a police officer or a collector joined the camp for a day or two, and then the talk at dinner veered towards the revenue, the floods, or the records. Now and then Major Gascoigne cut across the country, caught up the party, and remained a short time. Angel hailed these visits

with a deep but secret joy—though he by no means gave her the lion's share of his attention—it was a *solitude à trois*. He brought books and papers, which he read to the ladies as they worked under the trees; he brought them scraps of news, the latest station joke; he brought with him a quickened enjoyment of the lazy, long days, and when he departed, he left them the anticipation of his return.

One evening Mrs. Gordon was detained by a servant just as they were about to start for a stroll, and Major Gascoigne and his cousin went on alone. They left the white tents behind them, and sauntered down to a ruined well, such as one sees in the prints of Rebecca, or the Woman of Samaria. When they had reached it, Angel sat down on a broken step and said, "Let us wait here—she won't be long," nodding towards the distant camp. "I have something to show you," she continued, looking up at her companion. "I have had a long letter from grand-mamma this mail."

"Really?" he exclaimed; "and what has she to say?"

"That she misses me dreadfully, and is sorry for our quarrel. If I will forgive her, she will forgive me, and will be glad if I will return to live with her—for nothing."

Gascoigne gave a faint exclamation of surprise.

"She will lodge my passage money at once," continued the girl. "I have only to send a wire—perhaps you would read her letter?" and she held it up to him. Philip took it and read it over, slowly; Lady Augusta's writing was scratchy and illegible, but he gathered that she was devoted to her grandchild, and

the whole epistle breathed a passionate longing to see her once more.

Yes, it was all very well, he said to himself, as he mechanically folded up the letter, but why should an injurious influence be exerted over this fresh young life? Angel, although such an old, worldly-wise child of nine, was, thanks to Miss Morton, and a curious twist in her own character, as simple as nine, at the age of nineteen, simple-minded and sincere, for all her gay flirtations and her physical sorceries.

Yet this letter was the key to his difficulties. If Angel returned home to her grandmother, the Lady Augusta Gascoigne, who dared lift up a voice against her?—and he was free! He looked at the girl's profile against the crimson sunset, and asked himself, Was he free? Had he not, like all her acquaintance, fallen under the spell of this charming, bewitching, destroying Angel? What was she thinking about as she sat motionless, her face turned fixedly towards the West—that she would return to the West once more? No, no, no. He would never suffer her to pass into Lady Augusta's hands again.

Suddenly the impulse came upon him there and then—he determined to speak.

"What do you say?" she asked. "Have you anything to suggest—any alternative?" and her eyes were full of frank earnestness.

"Yes," he replied, "that you remain out here."

"How? Do you mean with Mrs. Gordon?—what an awful incubus for her—always."

"No—Angel——" and, as he spoke, he took off

his cap and twisted it in his hands, and stood before her bareheaded. "But as—*my wife*."

"Wife," she repeated, and a flood of colour rushed into her face. "Of course, this is a joke," she exclaimed, rising and speaking with a firm, almost passionate dignity.

"No—you and I are old friends, Angel—I—see—I've rather startled you—but I've been considering this question for some time. I'm seventeen years older than you are—I'm not the sort of lover—or husband you might naturally expect—but I'll do—my very best to make you happy."

All the time he was speaking Angel looked at him steadily, her colour had faded, she now was white to her lips. As he concluded, she cast down her eyes, and seemed to address the stones at her feet, as she whispered in a strange, subdued voice: "Why do you say all this? You don't love me, cousin Philip—and I—look for so much love—because I've had so little." Then raising her eyes by a strenuous act of will, and speaking in a firmer tone, she continued:

"You think I am a foolish, impulsive schoolgirl—you wish to give me a home, but grandmamma offers me the same—a home, and to make me happy."

"I believe I can do better than your grandmother."

"And that would not be saying much, would it?" she retorted. "I gathered from the way people looked, and hinted—you know I was always clever at finding things out—that it was very wrong of me to have rushed headlong to India. I placed you in a dilemma—you were quite at your wits' end to

know how to dispose of your white elephant—and now, you are asking me to marry you—and thus settle the difficulty.”

Her faltering words cast a revealing glare on the situation—there was absolute truth in what she said.

“I am not,” and she caught her breath sharply, “as silly as I seem—I expect—in short—I will have more than you can give. You cannot make me happy unless you love me—what you offer me is imitation. It is not big enough, or strong enough, to hold me—I want real love, not make-believe. I—am sure—it has cost you a great deal—to—to——” she hesitated, “speak! and I thank you—but I will go home by next mail, and live with grandmamma after all.”

As she came to this decision and a full stop, Angel sat down breathless and trembling. But now that the treasure was slipping from his grasp, the prize not so easily attained as he supposed, of course Gascoigne closed his hand upon it greedily.

“Angel, listen to me,” he cried impetuously. “Don’t talk of make-believes, and your grandmother, and such wild nonsense—I do love you—not in a romantic story-book fashion, but sincerely and faithfully in my own way. I was engaged once to a girl—you know?”

“Yes,” she assented sharply.

“That came to an end ten years ago. You are the only woman I shall ever love again—I swear.” He spoke in a tone of grave restrained emotion.

Angel still sat with her eyes on the ground, and made no sign whatever. Truly, this Angel was a stranger, an alien, and ill-understood!

“It was for your own sake I have been holding

back," he resumed with an effort—was he sure that he was speaking the truth? "I am a busy, self-centred man—I live in a groove—I feared your gay young life would be dull—with me."

"Never dull with you, Philip—you know that," she murmured under her breath.

"Will you think it over, and give me an answer when I come out on Wednesday?"

Angel made no reply. Her cousin looked at her downcast eyes, her twitching nostrils, and resumed, "If you wish to return home, of course I will do all in my power to help you." As he continued his voice was less steady, some inward barrier seemed to have given way under a confused pressure of emotion. "If you decide to stay—and I hope from my heart you will—then," and he stooped and kissed her hand, "when I come again, wear a flower in your dress."

* * * * *

Mrs. Gordon was sitting under the fly of her tent engrossed in a novel, when Major Gascoigne galloped up on Wednesday afternoon, having covered the forty miles which lay between Marwar and the camp in an extraordinarily short time. He had three horses posted on the road, and the bay Arab he rode was in a lather. Why this unusual haste? was Mrs. Gordon's mental interrogation. The reply came in a flash of prophetic insight. She interpreted her visitor's strange air of repressed excitement, his reckless ride; he had spoken to Angel, and had come for her reply.

"Where is Angel?" he asked, as soon as he had dismounted and exchanged a few words of greeting.

"Down by the well near the tamarinds, reading. Perhaps you will take her these letters?" suggested clever Mrs. Gordon, selecting two from a budget he had delivered; "and bring her back to tea."

"All right," he replied, "I'll be postman;" and without further parley, but with suspicious alacrity, he departed. In a short time he came in sight of Angel. She was sitting under the shade of an ancient tamarind—no tree in all the world is more beautiful; a book lay unheeded on her lap.

Would it be yes?—or would it be no? Philip was astonished at the fluttering of his nerves, the thumping of his heart. As he approached nearer, Angel stood up, and then came slowly to meet him. He looked at her eagerly; there were red roses in her cheeks—and a white one in her dress!

CHAPTER XXIII

ANGEL DECLINES A PENNY FOR HER THOUGHTS

A TELEGRAPH peon and a mounted orderly are passing through an entrance gate on which we find a board inscribed "Lieutenant-Colonel Gascoigne, R.E." It leads to a large bungalow, one of the highest rented in Marwar, and all its surroundings proclaim in a reserved and well-bred fashion that expense is no object; from the long row of well-filled stables—of which we catch a glimpse—to the smart, white-clothed servant, with silver crests on belt and turban, who runs briskly down the steps and extends a salver for our card. But we are not disposed to make a formal call; we have merely dropped in to see Philip and Angel, who have been man and wife for two years. They are to be found in a great cool room, at opposite ends of a hospitably-sized breakfast-table. Angel sits before the teapot in a listless manner; a portly fox-terrier squarely squatting on his haunches begs from her in vain.

Philip, in undress uniform, is reading a blue official, with a wrinkle between his brows. A pile of open telegrams lie at his right hand, whilst his breakfast cools. One realises at a glance that Philip is absorbed—that Angel is bored.

"Sit down, John," she said, sternly addressing the dog; "you have had two breakfasts already; you have no shame."

"I say," exclaimed her husband, suddenly folding up his document; "this is a nice business; I have to start for Garhwal at once."

Angel gave a sharp exclamation.

"There has been a tremendous landslip in the mountains, about a hundred and thirty miles north of Nani Tal."

"But if it is over, what can you do?" she protested.

"Prevent more damage, if possible. It seems to have been a unique catastrophe; a whole hill, four thousand feet high, has toppled over and jammed up the end of the valley, and turned the river Bela-Gunga into a lake five miles long."

"Does that matter? These hill Tals are so picturesque."

"Picturesque!" impatiently. "It won't be so picturesque when the snows melt and the rains come, and the lake which is filling slowly now bursts and floods a hundred and fifty miles of country."

"Oh, do you think it will be as bad as that?"

"I can tell you after I have inspected the place. I'm afraid I must be off to-morrow. I shall have a heap of things to get and do." He paused to summon a servant, and give an order in fluent Hindustani; "it's a God-forsaken spot, where there are no supplies," he resumed.

"Can't I go with you? Do take me for once," pleaded Angel. "I don't mind roughing it—I should enjoy it."

"You don't know what you are talking about," he interrupted. "There is scarcely a goat track; there will be little or no food—I'll sleep in a native hut and be out all day. It is a wild, lonely spot—impossible for a lady."

"You never take me," remonstrated Angel; "you volunteer, too—you *like* going."

"I do—it's my work," he answered coolly, now standing up and rapidly collecting his letters. Then he glanced over at his wife.

"Look here, old lady, I'll try and get back in three weeks. You must not take it to heart."

"I won't—if you will promise me one thing."

"Very well, I'll do my best, only"—now beckoning to his syce—"look sharp."

"Take me, the next time you go out in camp—promise?"

"All right, I will—if it is possible," he assented briskly. "Warn Hassan—he has to come with me and order in stores—usual thing. I must be off—I shall not be back to tiffin," and he hurried out.

"How keen he is to go, John, isn't he?" said Angel, leaning back in her chair, and bending her head so as to catch a glimpse of a rider and a bright bay horse dashing off from under the porch.

"Now I wonder what is to become of you, and me, and Sam?"

Their fate was speedily arranged. Angel went once more on tour with the Gordons; she was too young and attractive to be left at home alone, and since it was impossible for her husband to take her with him into Garhwal, Mrs. Gordon, who was extremely fond of Angel, and keenly enjoyed her companionship, carried her off into camp.

On the present occasion they were a party of four, which included Mr. Lindsay, collector of the district through which they were moving. As the Commissioner was obliged to consult with him for the purpose of inquiries into the loss of crops in these parts, owing to great floods, and hailstones, and the

consequent required reduction of the demand for revenue. It was a serious business; the district had suffered heavily, the tax-gatherer must withhold his hand, and Mr. Lindsay's presence and assistance were essential. He had been a month in the camp, but he was an old friend of the Gordons—years ago Mrs. Gordon had nursed him through a dangerous attack of enteric, and they had been intimate ever since.

Moreover, he was one of Mr. Gordon's favourite collectors, unmarried, brilliantly clever, first man of his year, an exceedingly welcome figure in society. Nor did the fact that he had golden prospects detract from his popularity. He was a tall, spare, clean-shaven man, with a slight stoop, a square forehead and jaw, wavy chestnut hair, deep china blue eyes, and a well-cut, eloquent mouth; indeed, it was almost as eloquent as his clever blue eyes. He could talk well, think closely, act wisely; but he was neither an athlete nor a sportsman; every snipe in its jeel, or tiger in the Terai, might rest in peace without fear of Alan Lindsay. His tastes were social and academic, and found other outlets than a spinning fishing-reel, or central-fire cartridges.

One day, by a strange chance—in the whirligig of time—Angel found herself back in the same neighbourhood where she had accepted her guardian as her husband. She walked down to the old well and the tamarind trees one afternoon quite alone. Angel had come there on purpose to meditate and review the past, and found the locality absolutely unchanged. There were the same tufts of grass, the same cracked stones, the same red sunset—possibly

the very same black ants. One might have quitted the scene but yesterday. She, too, was but little altered; only for the wedding ring on her finger it might almost be the very self-same Angel who had pledged her troth at this spot two years previously. She sat with her chin on her hand, her eyes fixed on the stretching plains, her thoughts very far away, as anyone could see, contemplating with an inward gaze the last two years. She recalled the whirl, the excitement, the importance of being a bride, a married girl with a fine house of her own, lovely presents, lovely frocks, tribes of friends, servants, carriages, horses—and a husband.

A domestic sovereign, her wishes were law. She was indulged and cherished in every possible way, but at the back of her mind there was a want; Philip, her first friend, did not love her as she loved him—she had bestowed her love with a fatal prodigality, whilst he merely cared for her as a pretty child, whom it was his pleasure to protect and indulge. Undoubtedly in his eyes—no matter what he said to the contrary—he still seemed to see her as a girl in a pigtail, instead of a woman who was clothed in the dignity of marriage. Nor had he attempted to bridge the gap of years—he was generally so serious—would it not have been wiser to have returned to grandmamma, who took nothing seriously but the pleasures of life! and—perhaps she would have married the young baron who had adored her. Surely it was better to be the one who was booted and spurred, than the one who was saddled and bridled.

Philip was entirely engrossed in his work. He

had developed into an official of importance. His life seemed to belong not to himself, much less to her, but to the Imperial Government; telegraph peons, mounted orderlies, and busy messengers crowded round his office, and it was often seven o'clock in the evening when he appeared in her sitting-room, looking utterly weary and fagged. Nevertheless she was bound to confess that he never forgot to ask her how she had spent the day? who had been to see her? whom she had been to see? how she had amused herself? This was her *rôle*; she was to play, whilst he worked. Then when they went out to dinners he scarcely glanced at her dress, and, of course, during the evening she never exchanged a word with him. Little did his partners guess how his wife envied them! Clever men and clever women absorbed all her husband's attention as their right—and she was deserted.

Philip never appeared to realise that she looked for anything beyond a pretty home, pretty frocks, horses and dogs, flowers and books, and a running stream of amusement. He was thoughtful of her health and comfort, most particular in the choice of her servants and horses, and then, having loaded her with luxuries, he withdrew into his work, and it never seemed to occur to him that her life lacked anything, least of all his own companionship. Angel was proud, and she kept her sorrow to herself. Only on one occasion her feelings had broken their prison, and she had thrown out a hint to Mrs. Gordon, who promptly said:

“Where, oh Princess, is the crumpled rose-leaf? What is your desire? What do you lack?”

"Love."

"My dear Angel!" she ejaculated.

"Yes—I've never had enough," she answered. "I feel something always starving and crying in my heart," she answered with a slight sob, and eyes full of tears.

"You silly, sentimental goose!" cried Mrs. Gordon. "You mean the sort of stuff one reads about in poetry, that flames and flares up, and goes out like a fire of straw?"

"No," rejoined the girl in a tone of repressed passion, "but a love that cannot endure separation—that turns away from everything in the world to you—that thinks of you—dreams of you—cannot live without you—and would die for you."

"My goodness, Angel!" exclaimed her friend, aghast; "but," she went on reflectively, "I believe I understand what you mean, though I have never experienced it myself, and"—with a short sigh—"never shall. I am thirty-six years of age, and I shall go to my grave never having seen what you speak of. The love you dream of is rare—it never came into *my* life."

"And what do you accept instead?" asked the girl sharply.

"Oh—community of interests—mutual forbearance and respect."

"Which means that you forbear—and all the world respects," broke in the old impulsive Angel. "Oh, Elinor," startled at her companion's face, "forgive me."

"Certainly, my dear; but of what have you to complain?"

"Philip," was the unexpected answer. "He treats me as a pretty petted child, who has to be cared for, amused, and supplied with toys."

"You forget that he has his work, his career. 'Love is of man's life a thing apart, 'tis woman's whole existence.' Do you want him to sit holding your hand, and swearing daily that he adores you?"

"Yes, I do," was her reckless reply. "I should never be tired of hearing it." Her companion looked at her helplessly.

"But, my dear child, Colonel Gascoigne has outgrown that age; he loves you very dearly."

"As one does a canary bird," broke in Angel; "I'm a woman—not a domestic pet."

"You are both," said Mrs. Gordon.

"I've tried my very best to make him jealous."

"What? Oh, Angel, you must be mad. That was playing with matches in a powder-mill. Do you want to ruin your life? Pray what was the result of your experiment?"

"Ignominious failure. Philip likes me to be popular and admired. I thought he would be annoyed if I went out driving with Major Shafto, who makes amends for his former hatred by an unbounded appreciation. I rode and drove with him, I danced with him five times running, and sat out conspicuously where Philip *must* see me; and all he said for my trouble and hours of boredom was, 'I'm so glad to find that you and old Billy are such capital friends. 'Twas never thus in childhood's hour!' and he laughed. I declare, I could have thrown a plate at him. Then I flirted desperately with General Warner, such an old darling! and Philip merely re-

marked, 'My dear child, the General is enchanted with you—poor old boy—he has a daughter of your age at home. I've not seen him so happy and so lively for ages.' Now," concluded Angel with a dramatic gesture, "what can you do with a husband like that?"

"I should leave him severely alone and try no more experiments. Pray tell me, Angel, could you be jealous?"

"I should think so," she answered in a flash, "furiously, fiendishly jealous; but that is a secret."

From this long digression we must return to Angel, where she was perched on the edge of the old well, thinking hard, as she rested her chin on her hand and watched with abstracted eyes the long line of cattle going towards their village, amid the usual cloud of powdery white dust. Suddenly she sat erect; she saw Mrs. Gordon and Alan Lindsay approaching her. What good friends they were! and yet people declared that there was no such thing as friendship between a man and a woman, that platonic were invariably platonic on one side alone. What would these scoffers say to Elinor Gordon and Alan Lindsay? Of course the fact of Mrs. Gordon having literally dragged Alan Lindsay out of the jaws of death was a strong and solid foundation for their liking—a woman always feels tenderly towards the patient she has nursed from infantile weakness back to strong, manly vigour; and they had so much in common, their minds seemed to reflect one another, they sometimes said the same thing, they liked the same books and authors, they held similar opinions on various interesting questions, and when

they differed, it was delightful to hear them argue; it was like two expert swordsmen fighting with foils—and occasionally without them. They would talk and urge and exhort, whilst Mr. Gordon fell asleep after dinner and snored lustily in the tent verandah, or returned to his great Persian poem; and Angel, who took but scanty part in these brilliant debates, being generally put to the sword at once, sat and knitted a sock, full of thoughts of Philip.

Angel watched the advancing pair with the critical, far-seeing eyes of her childhood. How lovely Elinor was, with her soft dark eyes, her high-bred air. How happy she looked, almost radiant. They made a distinguished looking couple. They seemed born for one another. What a pity that—that—well, did Alan Lindsay ever think it was a pity? Was it honestly friendship only, on his part? Did she fancy that sometimes his voice and eyes—oh, how hateful! How dared she imagine such vile things? Was it possible that anyone would think of Elinor as aught but a martyr and a saint? Nevertheless Angel felt the waking of a presentiment as the couple arrived face to face with her, and within speaking distance.

“How solemn you look—what is the matter, Mrs. Gascoigne?” called out Lindsay, “you might be Patience on a monument, or an angel looking for truth at the bottom of this well.”

“Am I—so—solemn?”

“I should think so,” said Mrs. Gordon, laughing. “You look as if you were trying to stare into the future. Pray what did you see—what were you thinking about?—in short, a penny for your thoughts.”

Angel felt herself colouring warmly; what would that vivacious, handsome couple say, were she to take them at their word, and tell them that she had grave misgivings of their five-years'-old friendship?

"No, no," she stammered with an effort at a joke, "my thoughts are not in the market—they are too valuable to be bestowed."

"I can guess where they were, my young Penelope—up in the Garhwal," said her friend. "And now to return good for evil, I beg to inform you that we were talking about you."

"What have you been saying?" she asked. "If it is bad, you won't tell me, of course?"

"We were calling the roll of our acquaintance, and have come to the conclusion that you are the most to be envied person we know in all the wide world."

"I?" with a short little laugh; "you are not in earnest?"

"Certainly we are," replied Mr. Lindsay; "and you say that with such an ungrateful air. You cannot deny that you have youth, health, sufficient wealth—the beauty I leave you to fill in yourself—many friends—and a devoted husband."

"Oh, yes, you mean a husband devoted to his profession," she answered with a smile. Was Mrs. Gascoigne in jest or earnest now? and Lindsay looked at her narrowly.

"We did not come out like the native women to spend our time holding forth by the well," put in Mrs. Gordon impatiently. "Angel, the word is—march. You must take a good stiff walk. Let us go over to the village," pointing to a far distant clump of trees, "and call on the weaver's wife."

CHAPTER XXIV

THE SOOTHSAYER

WEEK by week the great camp moved on in its stately, deliberate fashion, through its accustomed districts. There was not as much variety in the daily life as in the ever changing surroundings. Donald Gordon was absorbed in heavy official work by day, and heavy unofficial work by night. Mrs. Gordon and Alan Lindsay were unconsciously absorbed in one another, and pretty Mrs. Gascoigne—with her old head on young shoulders—appeared to be absorbed in her own thoughts. She was curiously silent and grave; not a trace of gay, vivacious, chattering Angel remained.

Mr. Lindsay and Mrs. Gordon mutually wondered at the transformation, and solemnly compared notes. Mrs. Gordon attributed her friend's depression to the absence of her husband, whilst Alan Lindsay declared that it was due to the absence of amusements. How little did either of them suppose that the true cause of Mrs. Gascoigne's low spirits lay in themselves. Angel's quick suspicion, which had sprung to existence by the old well, had grown from that hour, till it became a strong, able-bodied fact, which thrust itself on an unwilling confidante, and made its voice heard; it declared lustily that there was more than mere gratitude and pure idyllic friendship in Alan Lindsay's attitude towards Elinor Gor-

don; something in his voice, in his manner, told tales. Was it possible that at thirty-six years of age, love, strong, impassioned love, had overtaken her friend after all? But no, Elinor dared not entertain him; she was a woman who would bar such an ill-timed visitor out—yes, with her own hand, she who had been the adviser, comforter, example of so many, whose influence as a good woman radiated afar, she to whom all the girls and young men came with their difficulties, drawn by her personal magnetism, who helped so many over “the bad places” of life, to whom everyone looked up. The noble, unselfish wife of tyrannical Donald Gordon, was she likely to fall from her high estate? As soon the moon and stars. Yet as the couple talked together so earnestly and so exclusively, the truth became more and more evident—it came and stared Angel in the face, and frightened her; she felt as if she were looking on at some terrible human tragedy, and of which she was the sole and helpless spectator. This man, Alan Lindsay, had found his fate too late; his fate was a jewel belonging to one who never valued it. And Elinor? To her thoughts and feelings Angel had no clue; sometimes her spirits were unusually gay, her laugh ringing and girlish; sometimes when she and Angel sat alone she looked almost old and haggard; her book or her work lay forgotten in her lap, her gaze was absent and introspective. Sometimes, as she sewed, she heaved a sudden but profound sigh.

Thus they passed their days, and moved on from camping-ground to camping-ground, through the poppy-fields, and the cane crops of the fairest province; the four who sat at table together, two whom

the inevitable had overtaken, the surly, unconscious husband, and the conscious looker-on.

* * * * *

Occasionally the camp was pitched within a ride of some little station, and visitors cantered out to early tea or tiffin. One day Mrs. Gordon entertained three guests, a man in the Opium (the worst paid department in India), his wife, and a girl who was on a visit with them, a pretty little person with a round baby face, fluffy hair, a pair of hard blue eyes, and an insatiable appetite for excitement. The party sat out in the shade of the peepul trees after tea, within view of the camp train—the horses and camels at their pickets, the dogs, the cows, the groups of servants, the scarlet and gold chuprassis lounging about waiting for orders, and the crowd of petitioners and villagers besieging the office tent.

Miss Cuffe, the spoiled beauty of a tiny station, condescended to remark that the scene was quite imposing and picturesque.

“Almost like what one would see at Drury Lane.”

“O horror! the pomp and glory of the Sirdar, as embodied in a great Indian encampment, compared to a pantomime.”

“I suppose you miss the theatres, Miss Cuffe?” said Lindsay, who had been released after a long day’s work.

“You are right,” she answered with a coquettish simper. “I do like a show. I did all the plays before I came out.”

“And we have nothing to offer you but snake-charmers, magic wallahs, and fortune-tellers. I believe there is one in camp now, a renowned Fakir

who lives in this part of the world; his fame has travelled to Agra."

"Oh, Mr. Lindsay, do, do send for him," pleaded Miss Cuffe.

"But I warn you that he is not pretty to look at; he generally prophesies evil things, and is, as a rule, under the influence of Bhang."

"I don't care in the least," she cried recklessly. "Do—do send for him. What do you say, Mrs. Gascoigne and Mrs. Gordon?" appealing to them.

"My fortune is told," replied Mrs. Gordon. "Fate cannot harm *me*; but have the Fakir by all means, if Mr. Lindsay can persuade him to appear."

In another moment two messengers had been despatched in search of the soothsayer. Miss Cuffe resolved to make the most of the brilliant opportunity of cultivating Mr. Lindsay, the popular collector, who was said to be next heir to seven thousand a year. The best way to interest him, thought the shrewd little person, is to talk of his district and his work.

"I am so ignorant, Mr. Lindsay," she remarked pathetically; "only just two months in India. Do tell me what all the people round here," waving her plump hands, "believe in?"

"What an immense question!" he exclaimed. "Do you mean the peasants?"

She nodded her head with an emphasis that was impressive, although all the time she was neither thinking nor caring about the peasants, but reflecting that here was a providential occasion for her to cement an acquaintance with this charming and eligible *parti*; the coast was clear from rivals; there

was no one to absorb his devotion and claim his attention but two stupid married ladies, who had been in camp for weeks—and of whom he must be so tired.

“Well, the peasant’s mental horizon is rather limited,” said Mr. Lindsay. “He has some sort of belief in a Providence whose benevolence is shown in restricting malignant heavenly powers from doing mischief.”

“Yes,” assented the girl, though she had not in the least grasped what he meant. “And—what else?”

“Oh, well,” said Lindsay, secretly amazed at this intelligent social butterfly, “he trusts in a host of godlings who inhabit the pile of stones which form the village shrine. He believes that he would live for ever, were it not that some devil or witch plots against his life.”

“And is that all that he believes in?” questioned Miss Cuffe; and she raised her light blue eyes to her informant’s dark ones, with a look of tragic appeal.

“By no means. He believes that it is good to feed a Brahmin, that it is wrong to tell a lie, unless to benefit yourself. He believes that if he does an impious act he may be reborn as a rat or a worm; he believes that woman is an inferior creature whom you may bully with impunity. With a man, you must be more careful.”

“But these are the extremely poor and uneducated,” broke in Mrs. Gordon. “The more enlightened are different; they encourage charity, kindness, and simplicity; they are extremely devout—in that way they put many of us to shame.”

"And the women, how do they live? Have they no amusements?" inquired Miss Cuffe, turning pointedly from her hostess to the more attractive collector.

"Amusements? They do not know the meaning of the word. They work—I am speaking of the peasants—from dawn till dark, helping their husbands with the cultivation of the land, drawing water, cooking, weaving—they are hags at thirty, and their only release from drudgery is an occasional pilgrimage. You may see them marching for days packed in a country cart which crawls along from week to week and stage to stage; at last they reach their goal, Hurdwar—or Benares. They bathe and worship and offer sacrifice—it is the one event of their lives, and assures their future."

"One event," repeated Miss Cuffe. "How utterly miserable!—And what are their every-day habits?"

"Conservative—they wear the same fashion for twenty centuries, their food never varies, a little pepper and spices, the only relish—the plough, the spinning wheel, and loom, remain unchanged in a thousand years; of course, I am speaking of the villagers; the townsfolk have watches, sewing-machines, gramophones, and all manner of Europe goods, and rubbish, but the Ryot has no money or time to waste on such luxuries; it is all work, work, work, from generation to generation—the Ryot is the mainspring of the Empire."

"Poor creatures," exclaimed Miss Cuffe, "what lives of hideous toil. I suppose they don't know what happiness and love mean?"

"Oh, yes, they are sufficiently happy when they

bring off a good bargain, and they love their plot of land, their ancestral acre, with a fierce devouring ardour, passing the love of women."

"How much you know," sighed Miss Cuffe admiringly; "how much you tell me, that I never heard before."

"And here comes one who will possibly impart some events which are yet to come," and Mr. Lindsay indicated the tall lanky figure which was advancing in the wake of the chuprassis.

The Fakir was an old man, singularly emaciated. He wore a simple loin cloth and a row of huge beads; his legs were bandy, his voice was bass, his hair matted, in his eyes there was a piercing look bordering on madness. He came straight up to Lindsay and salaamed, entirely ignoring the opium wallah, and the three ladies.

"Take off your wedding ring, and lend it to me," whispered Miss Cuffe to Angel, "and we will see if we cannot puzzle him."

"Shall I tell the stars of the Lord Sahib only?" asked the Fakir, "and in his ear?"

"Oh, no," responded Lindsay, "the stars of the company, and one by one, so that all may hear—what the fates have in store for them."

"Yes, what fun it will be," said Miss Cuffe. "Mrs. Ellis," to her friend, "will you be done? Do, it will be so amusing."

"No, thank you," said the lady, "I am quite willing to listen to your fortunes, but I beg to decline hearing mine."

"I have heard that this man is marvellous," said

her husband, "and greatly feared by all the neighbours."

"Certainly his looks are not attractive," remarked Angel; "he seems to be getting impatient. Shall I break the ice—in other words, be done?"

There was an immediate chorus of assent, and she rose and came forward to where the Fakir was squatting. He also rose and drew his lean form to its full length. What a contrast the two figures presented, as they stood face to face; denizens of the East and West. The pretty fair English girl, with her dainty white gown, her little vanities of chains and laces, her well-groomed air; and the half-naked Fakir, with his mop of tangled hair, his starting ribs, his wild black eyes, his chest and forehead daubed with ashes, and, as a background to the pair, a circle of watching, eager retainers, the big tree stems, the white tents, and the flat cultivated plains merging into the blue horizon.

Angel put out her hand; the fortune-teller glanced at it curiously, then he looked up in her face with a strenuous stare, and there was a silence only broken by Miss Cuffe's titter. At last it came, a sonorous voice speaking as if pronouncing judgment.

"Oh, yea—thou art a wife."

"The servants told," giggled Miss Cuffe in an audible voice.

"Hush, hush," expostulated her friend, he is speaking."

"Thou wast given to a man by a dead hand—" another pause—"he married thee at the bidding of a woman—his foot is on thy heart—it is well, lo! he is a man—and to be trusted." He paused again and

salaamed to the earth, a sign that he had concluded, and once more squatted upon his heels.

"What? And is that all?" exclaimed Miss Cuffe, indignantly.

"I should think a little of that went a long way," observed Alan Lindsay, "what more would you have? He is not an ordinary magic wallah I can see, who promises jewels and lovers. He takes himself seriously."

The Fakir now beckoned solemnly to Mrs. Gordon, who, with a half apologetic laugh, came forward. He looked her in the face with his burning eyes, and said in a harsh voice:

"Where love should be—is emptiness. Where love should not be—lo! there it is."

Angel glanced involuntarily at Mr. Lindsay; he had grown curiously white.

"A shade cometh—I see no more." And again he dismissed his victim with a profound salaam.

"Dear me, what rubbish it all is," protested Mrs. Gordon, as she took her seat with a somewhat heightened colour.

"He is like Micaiah, the son of Imlah, who prophesied evil things; see, he is beckoning Mr. Lindsay. I wonder what terrible message he will deliver to him?"

"Lo, here are brains," announced the seer in his sonorous Hindustani,—understood of all but the little spinster, "much riches. A heart—some talk—sore trouble. Wisdom and honour come when the head is white, and the heart is dead."

"Now for me," cried Miss Cuffe, rubbing her hands gleefully, and ignorantly rushing on her fate.

"I declare I am quite nervous. I cannot bear his eyes. Mr. Lindsay, do please stand close beside me and interpret." Then she beamed coquettishly on the grim native, as if she would exhort good fortune by her smiles.

He looked at her, with fierce contempt, and said, "Lo, 'tis a weakling, Miss Sahib, thou art a fool; the ring belongs to the tall sad girl, with the hungry heart, and the daring spirit. Such a ring will never be thine. I smell death."

"What does he say?" cried Miss Cuffe, as soon as she was dismissed. "Do tell me at once, Mr. Lindsay; I hope it was something good?"

After an almost imperceptible pause, Mr. Lindsay replied, "He said the ring was not yours, it belonged to Mrs. Gascoigne. I think he was annoyed because you tried to get a rise out of him—he wouldn't work properly. I shouldn't wonder if he had cast the evil eye upon the whole lot of us."

"What a wretch!" she protested. "I am so sorry I asked you to send for him. I never dreamt that he would be a repulsive old skeleton dealing bad luck all round. It has not been such fun after all. Oh, here is Mr. Gordon! Oh, Mr. Gordon," she cried, "do come and have your fortune told;" and her little hard eyes glittered. Miss Cuffe did not like the Commissioner, and saw no reason why he should be spared, when misfortune was being dealt out.

"Give him ten rupees and he will make you a Viceroy," suggested the opium wallah with a laugh. "Where is the fellow? Has he gone?"

Yes, he was nowhere to be seen; he had vanished mysteriously and without payment. By Mr. Gor-

don's orders, the Fakir was searched for, high and low; he desired to question him respecting a certain peculiar murder case, but all search proved unavailing; the soothsayer had disappeared.

CHAPTER XXV

THE CHITACHAR CLUB

THIS long, leisurely tour through the crops, the villages, the jungles, brought Angel into more intimate touch with India than in all the previous years she had been in the country. Her knowledge of the language was an immense assistance to her; she had a keen enjoyment of the picturesque, a quick eye for character, and the rural life and scenery offered her a profoundly interesting study. Many an afternoon, accompanied by an escort of the camp dogs, including her own fox terriers, Sam and John, she took long walks or rides in its vicinity. These excursions afforded her far more pleasure than sitting under the tent flies, watching, with irrepressible yawns the interminable chess tournament between Mrs. Gordon and the collector—chess being a form of amusement which was beyond her intellectual grasp—or listening to Mr. Lindsay as he read aloud,—and he read extremely well,—choice bits of Ruskin, Walter Pater, and Rossetti.

But Angel required more variety—more actual life. She made her way into the huts of the peasant women, and talked to them eagerly, as they spun, or ground millet, or she joined the children among the crops, as they scared the flocks of monkeys and parrots, and cut grass for the buffaloes. Some were old friends she had made two years previously, and one and all welcomed the fair lady, and confided to her

their joys, their sorrows, and their schemes. How well she appeared to understand; she gave them small presents, of amazing magnificence in their eyes, and a sympathy that was still more surprising.

How hard their lives were, she said to herself continually—lives of unceasing, monotonous toil, though they had not to bear the winter cold and privations of the English poor, but too often famine and pestilence stalked hand-in-hand through their land. And yet how cheerful they appeared, how they loved their plot of land, trusted their affairs to their family priest, their future to the village god, found their amusements in the veriest trifles, and were content with their fate.

But the beautiful, fair English lady was not content with her fate—oh, no; much less with that which her clear eyes discerned, the fate which was rapidly overtaking her best friend.

* * * * *

The camp sometimes found itself in the vicinity of a large station, where it had its own quarters in the dignified seclusion of a mango tope, far aloof from bungalows, barracks, and bazaar. It came to pass that one morning Mr. Gordon's tents were pitched under a grove, not far from Chitachar cantonment, an out-of-the-way place, with a small garrison, and a sociable community. The chief residents called on Mrs. Gordon, the party were made honorary members of mess and club, the bazaar master sent an oblation of flowers and fruit, and the nearest local Thalukdar galloped in with his ragged horsemen to pay his respects to the Commissioner. Chitachar had been a post of importance

previous to the mutiny, much fighting had it witnessed; here and there a small walled-in space, resembling a garden, exhibited not merely shrubs and flowering trees, but tombstones. Desperate actions had been fought in unexpected localities, and even now it was whispered that the old commissariat stores,—formerly a fort,—were well supplied with water and ammunition, “in case anything should happen.” Surely nothing could ever disturb the calm of this peaceful spot, with its plains of green turf, the resort of cricketers and children, and its bungalows embowered in roses, its majestic trees and English-looking church?

Mr. Gordon liked Chitachar; it was his first station in India; thirty years previously he had arrived here as a raw-boned Scotchman, dour, clever, and sternly determined to get on. Here, he had lived in one of the cheapest bungalows in the cheapest fashion; here he had learnt Hindustani, self-confidence, and self-control. Here, he had nearly been fool enough to marry the daughter of a railway contractor; here, he returned a great man, travelling in semi-regal state, drawing a large income, the little king of the whole district.

Mrs. Gordon, Mr. Lindsay, and Angel, availed themselves promptly of the use of the station club. It was a modest establishment in comparison to the one at Ramghur: merely a long, flat-roofed building opening on the road, and overlooking the green plain, surrounded with bungalows and gardens. Immediately in front were two tennis courts, and a raised structure resembling a band-stand, where people assembled to drink tea. In the interior were two large

rooms, divided by a screen; in one, stood a venerable billiard table, in the other, a round table covered with magazine and papers. The walls of both were lined with books, and at the back ran dressing-rooms, and a lair, where the club peon boiled hot water, and made out the accounts. The resources of the club were pathetically limited, nevertheless it was most popular; all the community assembled there every afternoon, and many people at home in Cheltenham, Bayswater, and elsewhere, still cherish kindly memories of the Chitachar club.

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When Mrs. Gordon and her small party entered this popular resort, it was empty; the members were playing badminton or polo, or riding and driving in the neighbourhood (there was a choice of no less than four routes, including the cutcha road, and the old boat bridge). No one was to be found on the premises but a bearer, who was dressing the lamps, and a dog, who lay in the verandah catching flies.

"What furniture!" said Angel, looking about her. "Did you ever see such a sofa, and such chairs—they must have come out of the ark."

"More likely they came out of some bungalow looted in the Mutiny forty years ago, and then sold back to 'the sahibs,' " said Lindsay; "what tales they might tell!"

"I am glad they are not gifted with speech," said Angel, with a shudder.

"And the funny old prints, and the funny rules," said Mrs. Gordon, now criticising in her turn. "Any new books? No, as old as the hills," taking up two

or three, "and the magazines of last year. I wonder how it feels to live in such a sleepy hollow?"

"Rather agreeable," replied Lindsay. "I think I shall come here for the rest cure. I find they have the daily papers, including the *Pi*," glancing at the *Pioneer*. "Mrs. Gascoigne, did you see that nice little part about your husband? I meant to tell you yesterday."

"Where?" asked Angel eagerly, coming to the table as she spoke.

He placed the paper before her, and indicated the place, as she sank into a chair.

"Not much to do here?" he remarked, turning to the other lady, who was now rooting among the book shelves, and raised a flushed face and pair of dusty gloves.

"What do you think?" she cried, "there is a first edition of 'Adam Bede,' one volume missing, and a battered copy of Dr. Syntax—a first edition of 'Vilette'—what treasures!"

"I should not be surprised if you unearthed one of the books of the Vedas in a place like this," said Lindsay, contemptuously, "or the manuscript copy of 'Æsop's Fables.'"

"I don't suppose the club has bought any new novels within the memory of living man," said Mrs. Gordon.

"Probably not," said Lindsay. "I have no doubt that local topics and station gossip, amply supply the place of current fiction. There is nothing novel or interesting in the place. I am convinced that even the latest news is last year's scandal."

"How you do despise this poor old place!" re-

monstrated Mrs. Gordon. "I don't believe they ever gossip here, except about cooks and the price of kerosene oil. It's not at all a bad little club; it is quiet and unpretentious, and——"

"And dull," supplemented Lindsay with energy. "Come, let us go for a walk outside, and take a turn round the polo ground. What do you say, Mrs. Gascoigne? Or are you too grand, in consequence of your husband's achievements, to be seen with *us*?"

"Thank you, I think I'll remain in this funny old club," she replied, raising her head with a smile. "I want to look at the papers—perhaps I shall steal some of the books, and hear some of the gossip? At any rate, I can find my way back alone."

As she spoke, she reached for a weekly illustrated, and the other two, with an unacknowledged sense of relief, walked forth side by side into the beautiful Eastern evening.

Angel sat with her elbows planted on the table, absorbed in a story, till she was roused by footsteps and voices, the sound of ponies clattering up to the door, of men shouting for syces: people poured in, as it were, in a body. She felt a little shy, and hid herself as well as she could behind her paper. Those who noticed her casually, merely saw the top of a hat, and a white sleeve, and took for granted that she was one of the strangers from the camp.

Billiard balls began to be knocked about, lamps were lit, several ladies came to the table, some took up papers, and all talked.

"And so the Evanses have got their orders," said a deep voice beside Angel, addressing her *vis-a-vis*,

a handsome, rather haggard woman of thirty, dressed in a pretty pink cotton and a fashionable hat.

"I'm very sorry," she responded, "we shall miss them dreadfully—I've bespoke their cook."

"Well, he will console you—being the best in the station. I wanted him myself," said Deep Voice; "now I must wait till you go."

"But I shall probably carry him off," retorted the other lady with a laugh. "Any news in the papers?"

"Not a word," replied Deep Voice, "I read them all this morning," pushing over the *Pioneer*. "There is something about a man I knew when I was a girl—a Colonel Gascoigne—he has got on wonderfully—he can't be forty. We come from the same part of the world."

"Oh!" indifferently, reaching for the paper with a jingling of bangles, "was he, by any chance, the Gascoigne who broke his heart for Lola Waldershare?"

"Why," ejaculated Deep Voice, leaning forward and speaking with unexpected animation, "of course he was—she was Lola Hargreaves then. We lived within a mile of one another—my father was the rector of Earlsmead. I remember as if it happened last week, how excited we were when Philip and Lola were engaged; she was only about sixteen—they had always been devoted to one another, and made such a pretty pair, as romantic-looking as Paul and Virginia—and as young;" she paused, slightly out of breath.

"Do go on," drawled Pink Gown, "I know Vir-

ginia—she was not drowned—and she did not marry Paul.”

“No, though they were engaged for years. Mr. Hargreaves, her father, got into terrible difficulties, and Lola gave up Philip, and married an enormously rich old man—simply to save her family from ruin.”

“Oh!” exclaimed the other lady—it was a most eloquent, incredulous monosyllable—“and, pray, what became of Paul?”

“He came tearing home from some place abroad, but it was all no good—it was a question of money and mortgages, and keeping the old place. He was frightfully cut up, for he was madly in love with Lola; he went straight off to India, where, I believe, he has remained ever since.”

All this time Angel was wedged in tightly between the deep voice on one side, and a lady who was conscientiously doing the *World* acrostic on the other. Her parasol she had flung down on the middle of the table, where it was now half covered with papers; she, herself, was entirely concealed behind the weekly *Puppet Show*, though she could not see a picture, or read a line of print. Should she dash down her screen, snatch her parasol, and fly? While she was anxiously debating the question, Pink Dress said:

“Mr. Waldershare is dead, and his widow is not wealthy; in fact, she is cut off with an annuity of four hundred pounds a year, so perhaps she will come out here and look for her old love.”

“Too late,” announced Deep Voice, with tragic

emphasis (she had the voice of a stage queen); "he is married—he married two years ago."

"Oh, really; I did not know."

"If you had been out here two years ago, you would have heard a good deal about it. He married his ward, a giddy child, who ran away to him from school. When she arrived, he was fearfully taken aback—and so was the station."

"I suppose Mrs. Grundy kicked and screamed?"

"Yes; she did not believe in a guardian of six-and-thirty and a ward of eighteen; so, although Major Gascoigne moved heaven and earth to get out of it, he was forced to marry the girl."

There was a choking gasp beside Deep Voice, which she attributed to a dog under the table (for dogs and children were alike admitted into the Chitachar club).

"And how does Paul hit it off with the child of impulse?" inquired Pink Dress.

"Oh, pretty well—on the non-intervention system."

"I see—gives her her head—and she turns the heads of the station subalterns?"

"I cannot say; I never heard anything about her, except that she is very pretty. Her grandmother is Lady Augusta Gascoigne."

"You don't say so! Then Virginia the second is no *ingénue*," and Pink Gown nodded her hat till the feathers waved again.

"Lola was lovely," continued her friend, with enthusiasm. "She was deeply attached to Philip, and she sacrificed her happiness for her family. Oh, it was wonderful."

"You mean that she was really in love with this young Gascoigne?"

"Oh, yes," speaking with all her heart.

"Then if she ever comes across her first love—if they meet now she is free——"

This aspiration was just beyond the limits of Angel's fortitude; she put down her screen very quickly, and exhibited a ghastly face, as she bent over, murmured something to Mrs. Deep Voice, then rose to her feet, with a faint, "Will you kindly?" to her neighbours, as she extricated her chair; but she carried her head with the pride of all the "De Roncevalles," as she walked slowly out of the Chitachar club. Several men, who were smoking in the verandah, followed the girl's graceful figure with approving eyes, as she stepped out into the cool starlight.

"One of the ladies from the camp," remarked one. "She is pretty enough if she did not look so confoundedly seedy."

There was a clear young moon, as well as the bright stars, to light Angel back to the tent. Everyone else had their chokedar in waiting, with his big stick and lantern, as the roads were frequented by Karites—(a deadly form of small snake resembling a bit of a broken branch on which the unwary may tread, and die within the hour). Karites had no respect whatever for the moon—she belonged to them—but they were afraid of big moons held close to them, accompanied by clumping sticks, and slid away nervously when they were approaching.

Angel hurried homewards, totally ignorant of her danger, and as she rushed along, she noticed two

figures,—at whom the young moon stared with merciless severity. They were advancing very slowly—yes, halting occasionally to talk—but oh, she had no heart for other people's troubles now. To think of Lola, whom she had detested, giving up Philip—the idea was almost too immense to grasp—and marrying an old man, in order to save her family. Oh, what self-sacrifice, what a common, selfish, everyday creature she was in comparison! Such nobility was beyond her reach, and if Mr. Waldershare had died a year sooner, if she had not rushed out so madly and hampered Philip with herself, he and Lola might have been happy after all. As she stumbled into her tent, and flung herself on her bed, she was once more the old emotional Angel, agonising with the misery of her aching heart. There were three people who were bound to be unhappy—two as long as she lived and stood between them, and she was the younger by many years. What a prospect! Angel was experiencing the hopeless agony of an exceptional soul; the closing of adverse powers round a passionate strength, that would carve its way freely, and as she crushed her face into her pillow she moaned:

“Oh, poor Philip—poor Lola—and poor me!”

* * * * *

“What did she say to you?” asked Pink Gown eagerly, as soon as Angel had trailed away into the verandah. “I never saw such a pair of tragic blue eyes; she was white to the very lips. Do you think she has been taken ill? You know that tope is notoriously feverish.”

“You will never guess what she said,” stuttered

the other lady, who was almost purple in the face, and whose expression and gaspings threatened apoplexy. "She—she—said, 'Excuse me—but I think I ought to tell you—that I am—Mrs. Gascoigne.' "

Sensation.

* * * * *

A sensation which circulated round the table, and thrilled the little circle; such a sensation had not been experienced since the hailstones in the thunder-storm had broken the skylight, and hopped about on the billiard-table. On the present occasion, the sensation was limited to the ladies, and a proud woman was she, who could rehearse effectively the little scene, as she sat at dinner, to the partner of her joys and jokes. In about twenty minutes' time, when the ladies had somewhat recovered from the shock, and had done their best to recall and recapitulate what had been said—and what had *not* been said—Mrs. Fitzjohn and Mrs. Danvers, the deep-voiced matron, resumed their conversation, the latter was really eager to talk of her old friend Lola.

"Is it not strange that you and I should be discussing Lola Hargreaves, and that just here in this little out-of-the-way station, are two of her friends. The world is a small place. Have you seen her lately?"

"About a year ago; but I only know her as Mrs. Waldershare, and I would not call myself—her friend——"

"No?" sitting up rather aghast. "She used to be such a nice girl, and so pretty, and popular."

"Oh, she is very good-looking indeed, but I would scarcely label her as *nice*. She is a desperate gambler—that is no secret. Mr. Waldershare found her

out, and had twice to pay enormous sums she lost at Monte Carlo."

"Dear me—it seems incredible."

"Yes, for she is so charming and seductive—she deceives casual acquaintances. All the world gaped when they read the epitome of Reuben Waldershare's will, and that he left a million and a half, and to his wife nothing but a pittance and her personal belongings."

"Then—then——" stammered the parson's daughter, "I'm afraid—she must have been foolish?"

"If you mean that she flirted—no, never, unless there was something to gain by it. But she is one of those what I call trampling women, who are determined to get all the good out of life—no matter who suffers."

"My dear Mrs. Fitzjohn," said Deep Voice, and in that voice there was a loud note of indignation, "Lola Hargreaves was never like *this*. She sacrificed herself entirely for her family, as I've told you. Mr. Waldershare helped her father, and saved him from disgrace—saved the estates, too. I was her bridesmaid," speaking as if this alone were a certificate of virtue. "And I never saw anyone look so white in my life. Oh yes, she sacrificed herself—we all felt that."

"Sacrificed herself for—herself," retorted Pink Gown, vindictively, "I'm afraid she must be greatly changed since you knew her."

"I do not see why she should."

"Her one passion is gambling."

"Oh, well, of course it is in the family—her father ruined himself."

"I went home with her on board ship from Egypt; she always made me think of Cleopatra, the serpent of the old Nile; she was so long and willowy, and seemed to twine and glide about, and to fascinate. She only exercised her fascinations on rich men, and that but seldom; but if they went and sat by her deck-chair they were lost! Mr. Waldush would talk to them, and dazzle them, and then say: 'Shall we have a little game?' She won large sums, and never showed the smallest excitement, and when she gathered up her winnings with her long white fingers, would say, in her sweetest manner, 'Oh, you should have played this, or that, card.' She is a marvellous player; and has the brain of a mathematician, the men declared."

"I'm glad she has even that," rejoined her bridesmaid, with considerable heat. "I speak of Lola as I found her, and I stick to the fact that she gave up Gascoigne to save Earlsmead from going to the hammer, and to provide for her mother and brothers," and there was more than a suspicion of sharpness in the key.

"And I," said Mrs. Fitzjohn, "stick to the fact that Earlsmead went to the hammer; that the pecuniary help was comparatively insignificant. I speak with authority, as my sister is married to Edgar Hargreaves, Lola's eldest brother. The place is gone from him and his heirs for ever; they can just barely get along, and no more. Lola had no idea of marrying a sub. in the Sappers when she could marry a millionaire with forty thousand a

year—she said so; and I know that she gave old Mr. Waldershare any amount of encouragement; in fact, she threw herself at his feet.” Mrs. Danvers, of the Deep Voice, threw up her head indignantly, and glared at her opponent, but made no reply. “Lola Waldershare is one of those women who knows exactly what she wants—and gets it.”

“She did not gain much by her marriage, at any rate,” argued her bridesmaid, with a sneer.

“Only ten years’ enjoyment of every imaginable luxury,” retorted the other lady; “carriages, diamonds, society, admiration, excitement, the spending of immense sums of money—on herself——” Mrs. Danvers merely gave a dry, incredulous cough, and began to put on her gloves. “I fancy she is rather at a loose end now,” resumed Mrs. Hargreaves’s sister, speaking in a cool but acrimonious key; “roaming about, most likely, seeking whom she may devour. If she ranges out here, she will probably fasten on the Gascoignes; and I shall be sincerely sorry for that pretty, conscientious girl, who gave us all such a shock just now.”

“If she ‘ranges out here,’ as you so elegantly express it, she will have no occasion to fasten on anyone,” rejoined Mrs. Danvers, with temper; “her home will be with me, her girl friend, her bridesmaid. I shall ask her—indeed, I shall wire to her—at once.”

“I doubt if she would find scope for her enchantments in Chitachar,” said Mrs. Fitzjohn; “there is not an open carriage, a roulette board, or a rich man, in the station. However, you may send off

your telegram, and enjoy her society immediately," and she pointed to a list of arrivals at Bombay.

"The sooner I see her, the better I shall be pleased," said Mrs. Danvers, in a voice resembling the trumpeting of an elephant. I shall send a wire now. I can't think how I overlooked the passenger lists.

As she spoke she put down the paper, pushed back her chair, and left the table.

At any rate, she had secured that consolation prize, "the last word." And if Lola Waldershare did nothing else, if she never set foot in the station, at least she had been the means of occasioning a lasting antagonism between two of the very few ladies, in the Chitachar Club.

CHAPTER XXVI

IN ANGEL'S TENT

SEVERAL guests from the station were added to the camp dinner table, the Commissioner's Khansamah contrived an impressive *mènu*, and a dazzling display of plate and flowers. The wine was incomparable—though the host greatly preferred Scotch whisky—and everything and everyone contributed to a pleasant evening, except Donald Gordon, who, as usual, devoured the meal in silence, and Mrs. Gascoigne, who was depressingly dumb, and most startlingly pale. In answer to enquiries, she pleaded a bad headache, and after the ladies had risen, departed to her tent.

The camp moved on the following morning, and as Angel rode past the insignificant little club, she gazed at it with a curious expression on her face. To her, it represented the temple of truth. Well, after all—truth was everything, she said to herself,—nothing else was of the same value, hopes and fears, rights and wrongs, shrivelled to dust, in the presence of truth.

Days went by, and Angel still remained silent, pale, and self-absorbed, her spirits occasionally rising to their normal height, then falling far below zero. One evening, as she was going to bed, and sat brushing her mane of hair with listless hand, the tent flap was abruptly raised, and Mrs. Gordon entered.

"My dear child," she said, "I'm not going to stand this any longer. What is the matter? Even my husband has noticed you—it is something more than a common headache. Now, Angel, surely you will tell me?"

"Yes," she answered with sudden passion, and she tossed her hair back, and looked fixedly at her visitor. "It is not a headache which hurts me—but a terrible heartache."

"What!" in a horrified voice. "Oh, no, Angel—no."

"Yes—sit down there on my bed, and I will tell you all about it—and then——" heaving a quick breath, "you will have to tell me—something."

Mrs. Gordon accepted the invitation in puzzled silence, and Angel pursued.

"You remember the evening we were at Chitachar Club, rummaging among all the fusty old books, and how I stayed behind, and joked about listening to gossip—when you and Mr. Lindsay went out?"

Mrs. Gordon nodded, and coloured faintly.

"I heard more gossip than I expected! After a time a crowd came in, and two ladies sat close beside me, so closely that I could hardly move my elbows. They began to discuss a certain Mrs. Waldershare, a widow"—here Angel stood erect in the middle of the tent, with a mantle of flowing fair hair over her white dressing-gown—"who jilted Philip years ago." Mrs. Gordon sat erect and gave a little gasp. "He was always devoted to her, ever since they were playfellows,—now she is free—but he is married."

"Why, of course he is!" cried Mrs. Gordon, recovering her wits, "what nonsense this is, Angel.

Why are you so tragic? you only want a dagger to be Lady Macbeth!"

"Please let me go on—the lady said 'Yes, he is married to a mere chit, a child, his ward, who ran away to him from school—he had to marry her, though he moved heaven and earth to get out of it.' Now"—and here Angel took a deep breath, and turned a pair of agonised eyes on her companion—"tell me—dear—good friend—is this the truth, that the station opinion was so strong, that Philip was—forced—to marry—me? Yes, yes, you have grown red—my God!—it is true." And Angel threw her brush to the end of the tent, and suddenly sank on the ground, and buried her head in her hands.

Mrs. Gordon instantly bent over, and put her arms tenderly round the girl, whose form now shook with hard, dry sobs.

"And, oh! I loved him so," she moaned, "and he married me from pity—you remember what the fortune-teller said—that a man had married me at the bidding of a woman—that woman was *you*—" she cried suddenly, raising her head, and wrenching herself free. "Oh, how could you degrade me like that? How could you—be so wicked?"

"Now listen to me, Angel," urged her friend soothingly. "Do hear what I have to say."

"No, no, no," she sobbed, "you will try to excuse it—you will tell me lies."

"I will not, Angel—upon my honour."

Angel flung back her hair, and stood up expectant, whilst Mrs. Gordon resumed her place on the camp cot.

"When—when—" she began, and her lips felt

hard and dry, "you came out so suddenly, you were guilty of a most unpardonable act—it was very wrong."

"It was very wrong to vilify my mother," interrupted the girl passionately.

"Perhaps so, but you know you undertook the trip, half as a joke, thanks to your giddy young friend; you never realised the years that had drawn you and Philip closer together, that he was comparatively young, and unmarried, that you were a grown-up woman. If you had—you would not have come—confess, that this fact struck you the instant you met him? Come, now, Angel, be honest."

"Yes, of course, I will be honest—you are right—it did, and I was simply horrified," admitted Angel gravely. "I had expected a man, a little stout, and bald, and grey—you see, I had no photograph to guide me, and six or seven years are ages at my time of life, more than twenty later on. The moment I saw Philip, I realised the awful mistake I had made, and felt almost inclined to turn and run away back into the wet jungle, but I pulled myself together, and did my best to carry it off with a high hand; there was nothing else to do."

"I know that Mrs. Flant and her sister discovered you *tête-à-tête*—you, a young girl, and unchaperoned. Then it seems that you attracted Miss Ball's admirer, this was too much for her forbearance; to avenge herself she told a story to the station, she and Mrs. Flant whispered that they did not believe you were only just out—or as simple as you pretended. They said you had possibly—no, I won't go on," as Angel's face grew fixed and ghastly. "The talk had

become a clamour by the time Philip appeared; perhaps you may understand the whisperings, the silences, and the curt refusals of our invitations, that puzzled us so much?"

"I understand—all—*now*."

"Then of course Philip had to be told. At first he absolutely refused to believe his ears, but the lie had had a long start, and was strong and unflinching. He did not wish to marry you——"

"So the other woman said."

"He thought you much too young; he declared you should see the world, and make your choice, and not be put off with a dull old bachelor. He was thinking of you, he was indeed, Angel," trying to reach Angel's hand, but she twisted it away, "he loves you very sincerely, and loyally in his own way. Has he not made you an admirable husband? There is the answer to that silly woman's chatter. Don't you believe, my dear," and she now took Angel's hand firmly in hers, "that he loves you?"

"Yes," rudely snatching her fingers away, "precisely as he did when I was a little girl at school, not with all his soul, and all his strength, as he loved Lola—not"—drawing a long breath, and transfixing her friend with her eyes—"as Alan Lindsay—loves you."

"Angel! What do you mean!" stammered the receiver of this rude shock, and the slumbering fire in her dark eyes kindled to a blaze. "How dare you?"

"Why should I not dare?" demanded the girl fiercely, "this is the place and time for plain speaking—lip to lip and eye to eye. Philip is straight, as they

called him—*he* would never make love to a married woman—not even,” and she gave an odd laugh, “to his own wife. He is careful of my health, of the horses I ride, the people I know, he jumps up when I enter a room, he hurries to fetch me a wrap, but he never—*never* kisses my work, or my book, when I am not looking—nor waits patiently for hours to have a word with me—alone—as a man we know, waits for—you.”

“Angel—Mrs. Gascoigne,” said her listener, who had suddenly assumed all the dignity of the wife of the Commissioner, “you have taken leave of your senses. You have had—a—a—sunstroke.”

“No—no—I am quite sane, thank you,” she replied, “and perfectly cool-headed; “you may remember that as a child I was very sharp at seeing things that never occurred to other people. The faculty has not deserted me. I believe all women are possessed of an instinct, and recognise love when they see it. Dear Elinor, do forgive me,” she pleaded, and her voice broke, “because I love you, and I have so few to love. If I do not speak to you—who will dare? My sight is terribly keen—I cannot help it—I cannot help seeing that Philip does not love me—that Alan Lindsay does love you.” She paused for a moment, threw back her hair, and went on, standing directly before her companion, who sat on the side of the cot with a countenance as expressionless as a mask, “You are beautiful—you are sympathetic—you are good,” continued the girl in a clear ringing voice, “all the world knows you, as the admirable wife of—a block—of Aberdeen granite. Half the young men and the girls in the district have come under

your influence—which has always been noble and pure. It is as far-reaching and penetrating as the sun—it is your responsibility; and now love has come to claim you—and you are in danger, or why these long walks, and absorbing conversations, and early strolls to see the sun rise, and late strolls to see the moon rise? No one has recognised the danger but we three—you and I and Mr. Lindsay. You must send him away—before it is too late.”

With her white robe, flowing locks, and earnest and impassioned face, Angel might almost have stood for a picture of her namesake.

“It is strange,” began her companion in a husky voice, “that you should be exhorting me—a woman who is fourteen years older than yourself—who remembers you a child.”

“Yes, it is strange—it is, I’m afraid, unpardonable. I expect you will send me back to Marwar tomorrow, and I am ready to go. I feel that I must speak, and risk your friendship—for your own sake;” then she added, “Oh, have I not said, and seen—what is true?”

The immediate answer was long delayed, then suddenly Mrs. Gordon bent her head upon her hands, and burst into tears; at last she looked up with streaming eyes, and said:

“Yes, your vision is clear;—I will not palter or fight off, or equivocate,—I do love Alan. Oh, what a relief it is to speak aloud, what I have scarcely dared to whisper to my own heart. Love has come to me at last; hitherto I have starved in the midst of plenty, now cruel fate has brought me a great gift—which I may not accept. I nursed Alan back

to life—he had gone to the very edge of the grave, and he says my voice recalled him; that he loved me, only dawned upon me recently; he has never dared to tell me in so many words, but I know it, and the fact fills me with almost intolerable joy. My husband is cold and formal; I was freezing into the same mould. Alan has melted my heart; I've warmed my hands before the fire of life——”

“Yes,” interrupted Angel, finishing the quotation, “but it does not sink—nor are you ready to depart! Elinor, I beseech you, send Mr. Lindsay away. You are not as other women—you have a name and example to live up to; your influence has been like a star, which, if it falls, means black darkness to hundreds.”

“You need not be afraid, Angel,” said Mrs. Gordon with a sob; “I will never succumb—with God’s help—but you do not realise what it is, to starve and shiver for years, and then be offered your heart’s desire, only to refuse it; a supreme influence seems to have taken possession of me, undefinable, and impalpable, but real and actual, as light or the electric current. But I see that you despise me; in your eyes I have fallen from my high estate,” and she rose and threw her arms tightly round Angel. “Yes, I despise myself.”

“Promise me that you will send him away,” whispered Angel.

“Yes, yes—that I promise. When we return to Marwar, he goes to England, and we shall never—never—meet again. Oh—never.”

“Goes to England?” repeated Angel, incredulously.

"He succeeded to his property some time ago, but has kept the matter quiet, and remains out in India for——"

"For your sake," interrupted Angel; "I understand. Well, I hope he will go soon."

Mrs. Gordon shivered involuntarily.

"It is strange—or is it not strange—that your husband has never noticed how friendly Mr. Lindsay is—with you?"

"No, no; he attributes it all entirely to himself. It would be impossible for him to realise that I could attract anyone in that way."

"And he is an old mole, grubbing away at the story of the love of Shireen and Ferhad, and never sees the real story which is enacted before his eyes."

"Oh, Angel, don't say such things, my dear—they hurt—they hurt."

"Yes, the truth is painful," acknowledged Angel. "I am brutal to you—because it hurts me. It is the truth that my husband's heart belongs to another woman. I cannot blame him; once and for ever, it is as it should be—and she is so beautiful, not only her face, but her character is lovely and noble. It is all a little hard on me, yet truth forces me to confess that there is no one to reproach but myself. Oh, what ease and comfort it would give me if I could blame some one. I threw myself upon Philip without thought or reflection, and I have cast myself between him and the woman he loves, and is now free to marry him—only for me—only for me—they would both be happy. I learnt all this at the little Chitachar Club. Listeners certainly hear bad news of themselves."

"My dear Angel, you are much too sensitive—you are morbid," interrupted her friend; "but you know the saying,

'Le temps passe,
L'eau coule,
Le cœur oublie.'

Philip has forgotten his first love years ago."

"No, no; Philip never forgets anything, and I should never have heard about Lola, only in the way I did. They loved each other as children. They love one another still. As I lie there on this little bed, do you know that I sometimes pray to die—a quiet, easy death—to sleep, and never wake. It would mean so much happiness to others—and—here she choked down a sob—"I don't think anyone would be very sorry, or miss me much—except the dogs, and you."

"Oh, Angel!" exclaimed her companion, "my dear child, you must *not* talk like this. I cannot imagine where you get hold of such extraordinarily wild ideas. If anything happened to you—it would break Philip's heart; he——"

"He," interrupted his wife, "would marry Lola within six months—or less. I hope so—tell him."

"Elinor," growled a voice, outside the flap of the tent, "what the devil do you mean by having lights burning at this hour and talking and disturbing people, and keeping Mrs. Gascoigne out of her bed? Go back to your own tent at once—come, don't dawdle," and Elinor, having embraced her guest, swiftly obeyed her lord and master.

It was noticed that the delightful cold weather

camp, usually so bracing and health-giving, had evidently been of no benefit to the two friends. When they returned to the station, people declared that they had never seen Mrs. Gordon look so fagged—no, not in the cholera year even, when she had nearly worked herself to death; and pretty Mrs. Gascoigne had not only lost her colour, but her spirits.

What had they been doing to themselves, or one another? Was it possible that they had quarrelled?

CHAPTER XXVII

“THE SIN”

COLONEL and Mrs. Gascoigne sat in their cool matted verandah drinking early morning tea, and watching the malees splashing water over the plants from their primitive earthen chatties, and the syce cutting luscious green lucerne for the expectant horses. Their only companions were the fox-terriers, Sam and John, and any description of the Gascoigne *ménage* which omitted these gentlemen would be inadequate and incomplete. They were twins, and as unlike in appearance and disposition as it was possible to be. Sam was a remarkably handsome dog, exhibiting all the best points of his race. He had a black face, bright tan eyebrows, and silky white ears; his disposition was sporting, affectionate, easy-going, and game, but his intellect was not brilliant. On the other hand, his brother was endowed with the master mind; *he* planned, and Sam carried out. It was John's great brain that found means to extricate them when they got into nasty scrapes connected with breakages, pet rabbit-killing, and egg scandals. In the clever discovery of other dogs' bone stores in ferreting out useful short cuts and rare sport, John was prominently to the front. Sam was a determined hatter—and, alas, “catter”—of unwearying energy and speed, but not insensible to luxury, caresses, and praise. He liked to lie on a lady's lap—although he weighed twenty-one solid pounds of bone and muscle. He liked to be petted,

and to have his throat scratched, and to repose in the middle of a soft down quilt (he being muddy or otherwise); but he was so handsome, and so insinuating, that his wishes were generally gratified.

Sam was a nice, simple, unaffected dog, and a general favourite. John was stout, well set on his legs, with no approach to style or pedigree; his head was too round, his nose too short—foolish people declared he had “a pretty face,” and judges admitted that his cat-like paws were models. He abhorred all endearments and liberties—though to gain certain ends he could beg and give the paw. He was fond of music, and came and sat under the piano when Angel played, occasionally accompanying her in soft, melodious howls. He also sang—to the mandoline. He was a very duck in the water, which his brother loathed. He was shamelessly greedy, and Sam was an ascetic. John was immensely clever, and Sam was a fool. John was self-centred, impulsive, and irritable. Occasionally he and his twin fought for no apparent reason, almost to the death, and were only separated by being vigorously pumped on, or torn, as it were, asunder. They were always badly mauled and covered with blood; Sam was invariably the victor, and immediately set himself to lick his brother’s wounds, who received this Samaritan-like attention with sullen toleration. On the sole occasion when John was the best dog he bore himself most unchivalrously, lorded it over his vanquished foe for twenty-four hours, and would not suffer him to come into the presence of their joint mistress, or to approach within six yards of his fat, vain-glorious self.

But John had delivered his brother from the disagreeable consequences of murder and theft, secured him excellent sport, and on one occasion saved his life, returning home in the middle of the night, rousing the household by his terrific howls, and leading forth a rescue party to where Sam—ever the most enterprising—was smothering in a snake hole. The couple thoroughly appreciated camp life, and, no doubt, bragged prodigiously of their feats and escapades to other less lucky dogs whom they met at the band-stand or in the club compound. At the present moment they were shivering to be taken out. John sat on his hind legs, his gaze pathetically fixed on Gascoigne's last piece of toast, for his greed and presumption were unique. Sam divided his attention between driving sparrows out of the verandah—those vulgar street boys of the world—and keeping a sharp eye on his master's movements.

"I say," said Gascoigne, "these fellows have done themselves well in camp! John is actually bloated; he has the figure of an alderman." Angel laughed. "But I can't say as much for you," and he looked at her steadily.

He was thinking how soon India robs a girl of her good looks. Angel was white, her cheeks were hollow, her features had sharpened.

"I should hope not," she retorted; "surely you don't want *me* to have the figure of an alderman?"

"I should like to see a little flesh on your bones," and he reached over and took up her limp hand and wrist. "What have you been doing to yourself, Angel?"

"Nothing."

“And no one has done anything to you? What is it? You seem rather down on your luck.”

“Then appearances are deceitful,” she answered, dragging away her hand. “I—I”—Angel was unaccustomed to telling broad, flat-footed lies—at last she brought out—“enjoyed myself *enormously*.”

“Though there were only the three of you! Donald Gordon is an able man, but a murderous bore—the compressed essence of a dozen wet blankets. A little of his society goes far. Oh, but I forgot—you had that fellow Lindsay. How did you like him?”

Angel coloured faintly; there was a moment’s perceptible hesitation before she said:

“I don’t dislike him.”

“Come! this is enthusiastic praise! and yet he is quite a ladies’ man; far more at home reading poetry than pig-sticking; in fact, he rides so badly that it makes me positively uncomfortable to see him. He is an humbling spectacle on a horse.”

“Um—yes; but I don’t think clever people generally ride well—as a rule,” said Angel.

“Then there must be a crowd of clever people in Marwar! By the way, I’m told that Lindsay came into his property about three or four months ago—why on earth does he not clear out? A man with six thousand a year is out of focus in India. What is his anchor out here, I wonder? A woman?”

Angel blushed furiously—guiltily. Gascoigne looked at her in mild surprise.

“How should I know?” she answered impatiently.

“He likes his work, just as you do yourself—he worked very hard indeed.”

"And when he had a little breathing time—how did he employ himself?"

"He played chess, and went for long walks and he read aloud—Rossetti and Browning."

"Just what I would expect."

"You need not scoff; you read to us yourself—once upon a time."

"True, oh, Angel; but then—I was in love."

"*Were* you?"

"Certainly I was. Shall I read to you now?" picking up the local paper. "We are a little late this morning; my horse had to be shod."

"Yes, do read," assented his wife; "but there is never anything in the paper now, but the plague—and the rupee."

"I say, listen to this," he exclaimed, beginning to read. "'Sad Accident at Suchapore.' Why, you must have met her."

"I don't in the least know what you mean, and I hope I do not."

"It's a Miss Cuffe. 'We regret to record a fatal carriage accident at Suchapore, which resulted in the death of Miss Mabel Cuffe, recently arrived from England. She and a friend were driving in a dogcart, when the horse took fright at an elephant, bolted, and upset the cart. The unfortunate girl was thrown out, and killed on the spot. This painful incident has thrown a gloom over the entire station.'"

"I should think so," exclaimed Angel. "How dreadful—and how soon."

"Dreadful—certainly," agreed Philip, looking at her interrogatively; "but why soon?"

“It is such a short time since I saw her; it seems only the other day we all had our fortunes told by a Fakir, and he said, when he looked at Miss Cuffe’s hand, ‘I see death.’ Of course she did not understand—and she was not told—and it was only a fortnight ago.”

“A mere coincidence,” said Gascoigne; “I don’t believe in these predictions. Did you have your fortune told too?”

“Oh, yes, we all had, including Mrs. Gordon.”

“And what did he tell you?”

Angel looked at him meditatively; she seemed to be making up her mind. At last she said:

“He told me that I was married.”

“That was nothing new or strange.”

“No; but that my husband had married me at the bidding of—another woman.”

“That, at least, has the merit of novelty.”

“And—truth?” she added quickly.

“Now, is it likely? I would be far more inclined to marry because a woman told me *not* to marry you. But I did not want any telling, did I, Angela *mia*?” and he bent over and brushed her cheek with his glove, and John instantly sat up, believing that it was something to eat. “You must cheer up, and come for a good gallop. Remember there is a big dinner at the Residency this evening.”

“Do you think that a lively prospect?”

“No; I dread big dinners of thirty.”

Here Gascoigne signed to the syces to bring up the horses, swung his wife into her saddle, and in another moment they were crossing the parade

ground at a sharp canter, followed by Sam and John *ventre à terre*.

* * * * *

A big official dinner in India is a solemnity, not a festivity; people are invited, and accept as a matter of duty. They do not anticipate enjoyment; but the women look forward with keen expectation to receiving their rightful precedence, and to exhibiting their newest gowns. Angel, though but twenty-three, was a lady who sat among the chief guests, thanks to her husband's position. As these were many years her senior, she was generally most desperately bored. On the present occasion, she contemplated the prospect with an involuntary sigh, as she swept down the steps in a graceful white gown, and got into the brougham, followed by Gascoigne, in all the usual evening war paint of a Colonel of the Royal Engineers.

"What a dull evening we shall have!" she exclaimed, as she held out her glove to be buttoned. "All oldish official people that we have met a hundred times. We do take our pleasures sadly."

"Yes, if you call this function a pleasure," said her husband, as he neatly completed his task. "I've a heap of work at home I ought to get through, instead of eating for two mortal hours, and listening to Lady Nobb—she is generally my fate. Her idea of conversation is a monologue on missionaries."

"Well, at least, it saves you exerting yourself. Oh dear," and Angel yawned, "if we could only have games or charades—or even blindman's-buff."

"What a profane suggestion," ejaculated her husband.

“Yes, or see a few new faces; and here we are—and there is Lady Nobb getting out of her carriage. Oh, Philip, she has on such a smart pink silk petticoat—quite a wicked petticoat!”

“Then I shall certainly make it the basis of our conversation,” said Gascoigne, as he opened the door and jumped out.

In a few minutes “Colonel and Mrs. Gascoigne” had been received by the aide-de-camp, and ushered into the great durbar room—a lofty, pillared apartment, with palms, rare Persian carpets, rose-shaded lamps, soft inviting lounges, beautiful curios, and many large photographs scattered here and there (the signed gift of passing guests in return for various favours received). In spite of Angel’s melancholy forecast it presented a brilliant scene, with brave men in uniform, and beautiful women in their best array.

The new arrivals were formally presented to their Excellencies, with whom they were on a most friendly everyday footing, and then drifted away into the crowd.

“Quite a collection of strangers,” said Alan Lindsay, as he attached himself pointedly to Angel. “I must say I think it’s hard lines on the Lieutenant-Governor and Lady Eustace to have to invite every Tom, Dick, and Harry who write their names in the book. I suppose you have seen Mrs. Gordon to-day?” he added in a cautious undertone.

“No,” very sharply.

“That is unusual, is it not?” he pursued; “she is not well—she was ‘Darwaza Bund’ when I called. I’m off in ten days’ time, I—think.”

"Oh, are you?" said Mrs. Gascoigne, in a more cordial tone. "How glad you must be!"

"I'm not glad, you know I'm not, and why," he said, fixing her with his keen eyes; "*you* know all about it." He made a quick, eager gesture and sat down on the sofa; then he bent his head towards her and murmured, "Why—pretend?"

Colonel Gascoigne, who was engaged in discussing hydrostatics and flying levels with a brother sapper, noticed this little scene,—Lindsay's assured attitude, his confidential pose. He stared for a second as if struck by some new idea, but at that instant his attention was required elsewhere.

"Hullo!" exclaimed his companion, "I thought we were going to stay all night, and I've seen the L. G. look twice at his watch. Here come the Blaines, and a friend. By Jove, she *was* worth waiting for."

Philip turned and glanced casually toward the entrance, and saw Sir Evans Blaine, K.C.B., and Lady Blaine, charged with apologies, and in the act of presenting their friend, "Mrs. Waldershare."

Lola! Yes, Lola herself, looking brilliantly lovely, a very queen of society. She wore a long trailing black gown, which followed her in sinuous lines along the soft white carpet, and shimmered as she moved, like the scales of a fish. Her arms were covered with tightly-fitting sleeves, her neck was very bare, according to the prevailing mode; the black jet set off her white skin to great advantage. A slender chain of diamonds encircled her throat and fell below her waist, and a diamond comb or crown shone amid her piled-up dark hair. In one hand she held a tiny

painted fan, and she carried herself like a sovereign prepared to receive the homage of her subjects.

Lola made a beautiful picture, as she stood talking with animation to the Lieutenant-Governor and became the immediate cynosure of every eye. To Lola, these were the moments that made life worth living.

Angel, who had been on the point of speaking sharply to Lindsay, held her breath as this vision swam into her view. Horror, surprise, admiration, chased one another through her brain. Her face looked white and wan, all her girlish beauty seemed to shrivel up and fade, as she realised that she and her rival were now within the lists.

Mr. Lindsay caught a glimpse of her expression, and exclaimed: “Oh the bewitching widow! Sandys of my service came out with her on board ship; she’s just arrived from home. Isn’t she a wonderful creation—and quite lovely.”

“Not very young,” remarked a lady who sat near, “but well versed in the arts of fascination. I would give a good deal to know the name of her dress-maker!—what a wonderful gown.”

“Yes,” agreed Lindsay, “dramatic and realistic—it’s not a gown—but a personality.”

“Do you know what she reminds me of,” continued the lady eagerly—a clever worn-looking woman, in a frumpish but expensive garment, a woman whose children and whose heart were in England—“it is a picture in a gallery in Munich. I stood before it for twenty minutes, and I went back to look at it twice; it is of a beautiful woman, a dark woman, with a face like hers—she is dressed entirely in a serpent, a great dark blue serpent, wound round her

body, whose head rests confidentially over her shoulder. They are both beautiful, both similar, both wickedly fascinating—and the name of the picture is ‘The Sin.’ ”

“My dear Mrs. Frobisher,” cried Lindsay, with affected horror, “how shocking—surely sin and this enchanting stranger have not even a bowing acquaintance.”

“Possibly not,” she answered dryly, “but she and ‘The Sin’ are identical in appearance.”

“And now we are on the move,” said Lindsay. “I am so fortunate as to have the honour of taking you in to dinner, Mrs. Gascoigne.”

Angel rose, and accepted the proffered arm in a sort of trance. Had Lola and Philip met? Would they sit near each other? Her eyes roved round anxiously, as she moved to her place at that exquisitely decorated table, covered with lovely La France roses, shining silver, and delicate ferns.

No, but it was almost worse, she said to herself with an inward groan; they were seated exactly opposite to one another; and Lola had such eloquent eyes!

CHAPTER XXVIII

MAKING FRIENDS

DURING that long official feast, Angel's thoughts were distracted and confused. They were engrossed by a couple lower down the table—of these she could only catch occasional glimpses—conveying a fleeting vision of a handsome dark profile and gold shoulder cords, and a lovely white throat, a dazzling chain, a dazzling face: besides all the heart-sickness occasioned by this picture she had on her left hand Alan Lindsay, sternly determined to endow her with his confidence—she fiercely resolved not to receive it. What a situation for one helpless young woman! No wonder that her appetite was miserable, her remarks vague and erratic, her face white, and her expression fixed—Mrs. Crabbe, who sat opposite, was delighted to hear her partner declare that he had “never seen any one go off so soon as Mrs. Gascoigne.”—To know that her husband and his beautiful first love were dining *vis-a-vis*, drinking to one another with their eyes—no—no—Philip was not like that! To know, that beside her sat the avowed lover of her dearest friend, who was only awaiting an opportunity to pour his cause into her ear, was almost too much for the endurance of any girl of two-and-twenty. And Angel's right-hand neighbour afforded her no support; he was as useless as a stuffed figure, being both deaf and shy. However,

she summoned her courage, girded herself for the fray, and rose to the occasion. Even as a child she had a wonderful spirit. Time after time she turned the conversation when it approached her friend.

"How heartless you are!" exclaimed Lindsay, when they had arrived at the first *entrée*. "I declare, you have no humanity, no sympathy—you are a stone."

"Very well—I am," she answered doggedly, "and I have no sympathy to spare for you."

"Pray, why not? I've always thought you so broad, and so bright, almost like an American girl. Certainly the American climate is favourable to intellectual vivacity."

"Intellect has nothing to do with the present case," said Angel sharply, "and no American girl would support your views."

"I'm not so sure of that, Mrs. Gascoigne. It is easy to get a divorce in the States—they are sensible people; why should a man and woman who are totally discordant be compelled to live together in misery all their lives? It's worse than penal servitude—what is there to bind them?"

"Their vows," she answered gravely.

Lindsay shrugged his shoulders, and gave a queer little laugh.

"I am so glad you are going away," said Angel, with undeniable rudeness.

"Yes, and so am I," he answered imperturbably, "if I do not go alone."

"Of course, you will go alone."

"Why of course? Why should not Elinor accompany me?" he asked, dropping his voice.

Mrs. Gascoigne became suddenly very red; her hand shook a little.

“He will set us free—we will marry in six months, and begin a new existence. What a maddening thing life is—a mass of mistakes. One’s hands are tied, and fate comes and mocks at us—but I intend to cut the cords. Here is Elinor’s life wasted with a boor, who values her less than a quire of foolscap, whilst I would lay down my life for her.” In the midst of this heroic speech potatoes were offered and declined.

“Listen,” he continued eagerly, “my plan is this——”

“Hush,” said Angel, “not so loud. Mrs. Crabbe opposite is exhibiting the liveliest interest in your conversation,—and I don’t want to hear any more.”

“You must hear,” he said inflexibly.

“Well, if I must, I suppose I must. I cannot escape from the table—I won’t agree with one word you say—so you are warned.”

“I want Elinor to come to England with me. I am now a wealthy man; after six months she will become my wife, and we shall be unutterably happy.”

“For a year—perhaps, and then you will both begin to realise your mistake; you will regret your career, and she will be grieving for her downfall. You will be each other’s punishment; Elinor will feel intense remorse, knowing what her evil example means to so many, and that her life’s work is destroyed. She will become old, worn, and unsatisfied, and you will be disillusioned.”

“You talk like a seer, Mrs. Gascoigne,” he sneered.

“I am far-sighted,” she admitted quietly.

"Don't you know—do you not see that it would be for Elinor's happiness to cast off this hideous life of pretence, and become my second self, my wife, the mistress of my dear old home?"

"She would be mad to listen to you," said Angel fiercely; "she will suffer, when you leave; she will mourn as for a death—oh, it will be a hard trial, but it is better to suffer and be strong now, and get it over, than to endure agonies of shame later on, and always. She will never listen to your plan. If she did, I would hold her back by main force; if she went she would have to drag *me* along with her. I will never let her go."

"I always thought you were her friend, and wished for her happiness."

"I am her friend—and I do not wish for her disgrace."

"Why are you so narrow-minded? Many *divorcés* are in society; and Elinor is so sweet and so good—her influence will always be felt wherever she goes."

"No, not when it is known that she has left her husband—with you. You must practise before you preach; and if I have read Mr. Gordon's character correctly, he will never divorce his wife."

"So," after a long pause Lindsay said, "you are not on my side?"

"No, nor ever will be—and what a discussion for a dinner-party!"

"It was my only opportunity. I asked Du Visne—he's a pal of mine—to send us in together if possible."

"If he had known your object, he would have

turned you out; now let us talk of anything—or nothing else. Ah! I see people putting on their gloves; thank goodness, we are going at last.”

* * * * *

As Angel sat in the drawing-room, mechanically turning over a book of photographs, too unnerved to mix with other women and talk gossip or chiffons, she suddenly looked up and found Lady Eustace beside her, who said:

“Mrs. Gascoigne, here is a lady who is most anxious to make your acquaintance. Let me introduce Mrs. Waldershare, a very old friend of your husband’s.”

Angel rose, and held out her hand in silence.

Was this the pretty girl that they said Philip had married? mentally asked Lola, as with one comprehensive glance she criticised her substitute. Why, her complexion was like a sheet of white paper, and her collar-bones stood out in pitiful prominence; but she had wonderful eyes, and her figure was graceful, her dress elegant.

“I felt that you and I ought to know one another as soon as possible,” said Lola in her drawling voice; “you know Philip and I are such old, old friends; we were girl and boy together, and I should so much like to be friends with his wife.”

“Thank you,” said Angel, faintly. What a namby-pamby creature! thought her listener—aloud, “Do let us go over and take possession of that most delicious-looking sofa and have a good, comfortable talk—before the men come,” and she led the way with admirable grace. “I think,” she continued, settling herself with a cushion at her back, “these

little after-dinner chats are such opportunities for seeing something of other women," and she nodded over at Angel with a delightful expression of good fellowship; she was considerably startled by the expression in the girl's eyes. What did they say?

They conveyed a grave, almost awed admiration; now Lola loved admiration, and accepted it greedily from any source, from a crossing-sweeper upwards. That Philip's wife should admire her with those great tragic blue eyes was funny. She always had an idea that Philip's wife would not care for her. This simple chit would care for her, and be exceedingly useful. She meant to place herself under the dear child's nice white wing—yes, and her name was Angel.

"Have you any children?" she asked softly.

Angel blushed to the roots of her hair, and shook her head.

"But dozens of dogs, I am sure! Philip was always crazy about dogs and horses, yes, and all sorts of horrid things, toads and tortoises and tadpoles. You are quite young," she resumed; "oh, how I wish I were your age!"

"I should not mind exchanging," said Angel, with a faint smile.

"I only wish we could," rejoined Lola with emphasis; "oh, you can't think how bitterly I cried the day I was thirty!"

"Really? Why should you mind, and you look so young." And then with an effort she asked, "Are you staying in Marwar, or just passing through?"

"Oh, I am staying with the Blaines for a day or two, then going up country to my brother Edgar.

I've come out to spend a year in India. I think I shall like it immensely, and I hope it will like me. The country is so bright and sunny, and everyone so cheery and so hospitable. I've met several people that I came out with on board ship, and we feel quite like old friends. There's Captain Hailes of the Muleteers, and the little Tudor boy, Sir Capel Tudor; we called him Cupid. He is ridiculously devoted to me. By the way," she went on in another key, "I suppose you have heard that Philip and I were engaged once," and she looked at her with a half-bantering expression.

"Yes, I know," responded the other gravely.

"For quite a long time—nearly four years. You won't," and she raised herself about half-an-inch and lightly touched Angel's hand, which hung limply over the back of the sofa, "you won't like me any the less—for being fond of him—will you, dear?"

"No, certainly not," with an eloquent gesture.

"In fact, it constitutes a bond between us—and you won't care for him any less," and she looked up into Angel's serious eyes, "because he used to like—me?"

"No," and then ensued a long pause.

"It was a funny marriage, was it not?" she resumed suddenly.

"What—whose?" asked her bewildered listener.

"Why, yours, dear. He was a hardened bachelor, and you were such a child. But it has turned out very well," another pause, "hasn't it, dear?"

"Oh, yes," blushing, and feeling curiously embarrassed.

"What a dear you are! I'm going to be so fond of

you; I know at once, when I like people or not. And you?"

"No, I'm not like that—it is too soon."

"Never too soon to begin a liking, dear."

"But I admire you more than anyone I've ever seen," said Angel impulsively.

"Come, that's a good start," patting her arm with a touch of patronage. By-and-by, I believe, when you know me—you will pity me."

"Pity *you*?" gazing at this lovely, languorous creature, with her shining gown, her shining jewels, her shining eyes.

"Ah! you are too young to know the tragedy of giving up, of annihilating self; of being misrepresented, slandered, and beggared. Well, I will tell you all about it some day. I'm coming to see you to-morrow. I am told newcomers call first. And here are the men. Do look at my little travelling friend, Sir Cupid. Ah, there is Phil," and she beckoned him with her fan. "Dear old Phil, how good it is to see you—how you bring back old times. Your wife and I have been making such friends, and having a long chat. Now," as he looked interrogatively from one to the other, "I'm going to have a good long talk with *you*." As Lola spoke, she rose and laid a small hand upon his sleeve, and with a little gay nod to Angel, glided away with Philip into the great verandah.

Angel sat up and gazed after the couple—Philip slight, erect, and soldierly, his head a little bent, his hands behind his back. No, he had not offered Lola his arm.

And Lola moving beside him with her graceful, undulating walk, looking up, and talking quickly all the time. She felt, as she watched them slowly disappear into the sitting-out verandah, as if the sun had been extinguished by a huge black cloud.

Lola was an enchantress. She herself had felt her influence, and was powerless. As she sat in a sort of dream, she heard a man's voice say, "Is she not ripping? Old Graydon lost his heart to her coming out."

"Yes," said another, "and young Tudor lost two hundred pounds to her, which is ten times worse." But, of course, they were not alluding to anyone she knew.

The *tête-à-tête* in the verandah lasted till carriages began to come rumbling under the big porch, and when Philip and Lola reappeared, she looked conspicuously radiant.

CHAPTER XXIX

LAST YEAR'S NEST

RESIDENCY parties invariably broke up in good time, and it was not more than half-past ten when Colonel Gascoigne handed his wife into her brougham, and set off, according to his custom, to walk home. To-night he had unusual food for thought, as he proceeded at a leisurely pace, smoking a most excellent Residency cheroot. So Lola had risen on the horizon in the character of a fascinating widow, with all the liberty, prestige, and self-possession usual to her class. How wonderful her eyes were! He came to a momentary standstill as he recalled them, and how her voice trembled as she talked of "long ago," and separation, and the cruelty of circumstance, and misapprehension. She revived a phase of his existence that he had almost forgotten; it was a little difficult to realise that he had been madly in love with her once. That was nearly fifteen years ago—how time flew—in the good old days when she could play cricket and rounders, and did not know how to use her eyes. These reflections were abruptly brought to a conclusion by the appearance of a bare-headed lady in silvery opera cloak, who was evidently awaiting him under an acacia tree by the edge of the maidan.

It was Angel, who, acting on a sudden impulse, had stopped the brougham and descended, and sent it home empty. She felt that she must escape from

her own company, her own terrible thoughts. She must talk to Philip about Lola without delay. No, she could not wait, even half-an-hour, for she was mentally staggering under the impact of a new sensation—the name of the sensation was jealousy. Her very soul was in a fever. Naturally highly-strung, fervent, and impetuous, Angel's whole being was centred in the longing to know what her husband thought of Lola—what of her—*which* of them did he love?

And as she stood by the roadside awaiting his coming, her heart seemed to beat, "Lola, Lola, Lola," and the distant frogs chorussed "Lola, Lola, Lola."

They were holding a reception in a neighbouring tank, safe from the barbarous paddy bird, and the ruthless crane.

* * * * *

"Oh, here you are at last!" said Angel; "it is such an exquisite night, I thought I would walk home," adding apologetically, as she held up her dainty shoe, "the road is as dry as a floor; let us go across the parade-ground."

"All right," he assented; "it is too early for snakes. How hot it was in that drawing-room, with those big lamps."

"It was," assented his wife, "but *you* must have found it cooler—in the verandah."

There was a significant pause, and then Colonel Gascoigne boldly broke the ice at the thickest part.

"There is nothing so certain as the unexpected," he said; "who would have thought of seeing Lola out here?"

"Who, indeed?" echoed Angel coolly; "and we were wishing so much for a new face, though her face is not new to you. Everyone comes to India nowadays. It would never surprise me if grand-mamma appeared. There she goes."

"What! your grandmother?"

"No, Mrs. Waldershare."

As she spoke a large open carriage bowled along the hard white road. It contained the Blaines and their guest, who waved her fan to the pair, with a gesture signifying approval and valediction.

"What do you think of her?" asked Philip, abruptly, as the horses' hoofs died away in a distant clip-clop.

"I think she is beautiful," answered Angel, in a voice that carried sincerity in its expression; "there can be but one opinion about that."

"I shouldn't have thought she was your style."

"Oh, yes, I admire dark people."

"Thank you, Angel; that is one to me. But you did not approve of her as a child."

"No, I was prejudiced, and, of course, I was no judge; but now that—that——" she hesitated. She was going to add, "that I know her story——"

"That you have arrived at years of discretion or indiscretion," he supplemented.

"Yes, now that I have arrived at years of experience, I do not wonder that you adored her."

Philip did not remark the little falter in her voice.

"How do you know that I adored her?"

"Did you not?" was her quick counter question.

"Well, then—yes."

"And were distracted with misery when she married Mr. Waldershare?"

"So they said," and as he spoke he knocked the ash off his cheroot with elaborate care.

"You have forgiven her"—and Angel caught her breath; "you forgave her to-night?"

"I forgave her ten years ago; but, my dear child, do not let us rake up the ashes of an old love affair that has been extinct for ages. I am quite prepared to be civil to Lola, as an old playfellow and friend, that's all. You will have to call on her, and ask her to dinner, and all that sort of thing."

Angel came to a sudden dead stop, and stood very straight in her long silvery cloak; her face was white as she gazed at her husband in the moonlight, with her extraordinarily piercing blue eyes.

"Playfellow—friend," she repeated, "do you believe that she will ever forget, or allow you to forget, that you were her old lover, her first love—she *won't*," she added with sudden passion. "She reminded me of it to-night, and declared that it was a bond between us."

"Then, my dear Angel, I leave her entirely in your hands," rejoined Philip, with a smile. He had a rare but beautiful smile, inherited from his mother. "She is an odd creature; she has an embarrassing way of speaking her thoughts aloud. She thought that, and unawares it escaped her lips. Lola is not young, she has plenty of sense, she knows that fifteen years roll between the—the old days—and these, and that," now laying his hand impressively upon Angel's arm, "there are no birds—in last year's nest."

"But——" she began excitedly.

"But," he echoed, turning his head sharply, "here comes young Hailes, running after us. He little dreams that you and I are discussing abstract sentiment at eleven o'clock at night, in the middle of the parade-ground."

"Oh, Mrs. Gascoigne," gasped Captain Hailes, breathlessly, "I believe this is yours—you dropped it on the road—just now."

"Yes, and how very kind of you to take so much trouble—it really was not worth it," said Angel, who inwardly wished both glove and finder a thousand miles away. She was anxious to pursue the subject of Lola, her opportunities for a *tête-à-tête* with Philip were so rare; and this odious but well-meaning Captain Hailes accompanied them all the way to their own gate.

CHAPTER XXX

A WHITED SEPULCHRE

BEFORE continuing this history, it is necessary to say a few words respecting Lola Waldershare. As Lola Hargreaves, ever lovely, seductive, and smiling, by strangers and mere acquaintances, she was looked upon as one of the most bewitching girls in the county. Her beauty, youthful graces, and charm, threw a dazzling glamour over her personality that her immediate surroundings were not blinded to her faults; her brothers recognised her selfishness; her mother was aware that her heart was hard as a nether millstone. Those who had little dealings with Miss Hargreaves learnt that she was not particularly truthful or scrupulous. The increasing straitness of the family fortunes, the struggle to make a brave display abroad, the shifts, shabbiness, and pinching, at home, the manoeuvres to evade creditors, and keep up appearances, had left their mark on Lola. Poverty was hideous; humiliation was unendurable; and Lola was resolved to be rich. A short season in London had shown her the value of her beauty; her face was, and should be, her fortune; and long before Philip Gascoigne had any idea of his fate, he had been mentally discarded by his *fiancée*. Letters are deceptive, it is so much easier to deceive by pen and ink than by word of mouth. What Mrs. Danvers had declared was perfectly true; Lola had sacrificed herself—for herself. In marrying Reuben Waldershare she attained

her wishes—though she would have been glad to eliminate two well-grown step-stons—and Mr. Waldershare, for his part, was well satisfied with his bargain. Unfortunately, in an evil moment he took his beautiful young wife to Monte Carlo, and there the Hargreaves' demon, the gambling demon, awoke, and seized upon her. The taint was in her blood; Lola was her father's own daughter. At first she was contented to win small sums at roulette, which she gleefully invested in hats and lace and trifling ornaments. After a week, as the poison began to work, she increased her stakes, and talked fluently of "douzaines" and "transversals" and "runs." She relinquished expeditions to Nice, or into Italy. She grudged every hour spent elsewhere than at the rooms. She had her own lucky table, her lucky charm, and, above all, her system. Like most beginners, she won largely, and Reuben Waldershare, who was obtrusively proud of his clever, elegantly dressed, smart wife, liked to see people crane over in order to watch her pretty eager face, as she sat with rolls of gold rouleaux before her, her pencil busy, her eyes ablaze.

Little did he know that he had fired a mine the day he placed three hundred pounds to his wife's account at the Credit Lyonnaise, and told her half in joke, that was "a little sum to play with."

Mrs. Waldershare now played incessantly—and played high.

"I like to put a 'mile' note on one number," she declared with a gay laugh; "I agree with an old man who sat next me, 'Ca vous donne des emotions.'"

Mrs. Waldershare returned each winter to the

Riviera as punctually as a swallow, ostensibly in search of health, but in reality to gamble continuously, extravagantly, and recklessly. She lost enormous sums; her husband's pride now changed to alarm. The husband of the lovely Mrs. Waldershare, who was winning to the envy and admiration of her neighbours, was a different being to the man who had to disburse staggering sums almost daily. Lola promised to give up gambling, and never to touch a card or back a number. Her promises were invariably broken—nothing would or could keep her away from the scene of her gains and losses. She owed huge bills in London and Paris; the money to pay these she had flung into the great gulf—she, whose luck was astonishing, was now secretly selling her jewels—and wearing paste. Mrs. Waldershare was again at Monte Carlo the year her husband died; her fascinations were irresistible. A beautiful woman, thirty years his junior, sweet, seductive, persuasive, her stolid elderly partner could not withstand her. He was suddenly called away to Paris, on urgent business, leaving Lola and her maid and many acquaintances at the Hotel de Paris, but before he departed he extracted a solemn promise from his wife that during his absence she would not enter the rooms, and this promise she vowed to keep. The first day she went over to Nice, the second day was wet, and seemingly endless, the third day something drew her into the Casino in spite of herself. The talk of her friends, of runs of colour, of great "coups," was too much for her miserable little will; something, she afterwards declared, dragged her forcibly into the Salle de Jeux. She went with a

party, merely in order to look on, but in twenty minutes' time, she was seated at the "trente et quarante" with a card a pin, and a pile of gold in front of her. She won—she won again the following day, and then she lost—lost—lost all the money—lost her self-control—lost her head. She borrowed until she could borrow no longer; in the frenzy of gambling, she drew a cheque for a thousand pounds and signed it "Reuben Waldershare." All moral sense expired, as she blotted the clever imitation of her husband's signature. This money followed her other losses in one short day, and then Lola was indeed desperate. She went at sundown and walked round Monaco, and gazed thoughtfully over the wall at a spot which other despairing eyes have measured, where there is a sheer precipice, lapped by the blue-green Mediterranean.

No, no—looking down always made her sick and giddy, she could *not* do it. Life was sweet. Reuben would certainly forgive her—after all, what was his, was hers.

When Mrs. Waldershare returned to the hotel, she found a telegram awaiting her; it announced that her husband was ill with a sharp attack of gout. She was requested to leave for Paris at once, and accompany him home. After a few days, during which time Lola made herself indispensable to the invalid, hourly hoping to seize a favourable moment, and make her little confession; unfortunately the cheque presented itself too promptly, and Reuben Waldershare, to whom such an act as forgery appeared as great a crime as murder, was deaf to all excuses and appeals. He raged with the

deadly slow anger of a phlegmatic nature; in this condition, he added a codicil to his will, and having done so, died rather suddenly of gout in the stomach. And now, Lola found herself a widow, with a small jointure and immense debts. She endeavoured to patch up the wreck of her affairs, she tried to beguile creditors, propitiate people she had snubbed, to make friends with her cast-off relations, but she was alike in the black books of her acquaintances and her tradespeople. She therefore resolved to shift her sky, and come out to India, ostensibly to visit her dearest brother Edgar (who had no desire for her company), and to see something of the East. She brought with her a maid, a quantity of smart gowns, a large stock of courage and enterprise, and a very small amount of ready money.

In short, she had come out to seek her fortune, precisely like the young adventurer one reads of in books of fairy and other tales. Marwar was a capital centre, she had gathered this information *en route*; Indian people were approachable, hospitable, and not too inquisitive; appearances go far, when one sails away from a—reputation.

Then by a wonderful stroke of luck she encountered Philip Gascoigne; as good-looking as ever; no longer the impetuous boy, the impassioned subaltern, but a cool, self-reliant, distinguished Philip, with a fine position, a heavy purse, and a dear, simple, appreciative wife. They would be extremely useful, introduce her to the best society, save her expense, and officiate as her sponsors.

These were a few of Mrs. Waldershare's reflections, as she drove into the Gascoignes' compound the afternoon succeeding the dinner-party.

CHAPTER XXXI

FISHING FOR AN INVITATION

MRS. WALDERSHARE presented a most charming picture, as she rustled into Mrs. Gascoigne's great drawing-room, with her exquisitely gloved hands eagerly extended. Her *entrée* was accompanied by the rustling of silk, a faint jingling of beads, and atmosphere of heliotrope. She wore an elaborate white dress, a black plumed hat, both unmistakably French and expensive.

"Oh, I am so ashamed!" she exclaimed; "I had to pay one or two other calls, and like a greedy child with sweets, I kept the best for the last. I had not the faintest idea it was so late."

"Better late than never," said her hostess, politely, and the gong at that moment sounded for tiffin.

"You will stay, won't you?" she urged, little knowing that her visitor had carefully timed her arrival in order to be sure of catching Philip at home; "I'll send away the gharry."

"Oh, thank you, I must confess it is a great temptation; but do you think the Blaines will mind?" and she looked at her hostess appealingly.

"I can write a line if you like. Philip," turning about as her husband entered, "here is Mrs. Waldershare—she will stay to lunch."

Lola gave her former lover her hand, and a long, expressing glance; then as Angel hurried out, she said: "What a charming home you have, Philip."

"I am glad you like it," he said cheerfully.

"How funny to think of this being your house, Philip, and of you being married and happy." She gazed up at him with soft interrogation as she spoke, then dropped her voice and said, "And I am solitary and homeless and poor—all my life, I've stood aside for others and—given up." One of Lola's chief accomplishments was to tell the most dramatic and delightful lies.

"I can't say that you answer your own description," replied Gascoigne, ignoring her touching insinuations. "I never saw anyone that looked more fit."

"Ah, appearances are deceitful," rejoined the lady with a sigh; "but how well you are looking—so little changed," another wistful glance.

"Won't you come into tiffin," said Angel, appearing suddenly. "I have sent off a note to Mrs. Blaine," and she led the way into the dining-room.

"What a delightful bungalow this is," remarked Lola, after she had helped herself carefully to mayonnaise; "so much larger than the Blaines'. Quite double the size."

"Yes, I suppose it is," assented Angel, carelessly.

"They have only one spare room. Of course they are not old friends, only board ship acquaintances, and it was so good of them to put me up; but I've got to turn out."

"You are going on to Edgar?" said her host.

"Oh, no, such a bore. The Edgars are moving, and won't be settled for a whole month. She is marching with the regiment to Seetapore, so I am going to take my chance in the Imperial Hotel here."

And Lola looked down, and sighed profoundly.

“Will it be very bad, do you think?” she asked, suddenly raising her eyes to Angel.

“I’m sure I cannot say; I’ve never stayed in a hotel in India, but a great many globe-trotters put up there in the cold weather.”

Philip gazed at his wife. Was she unable to recognise a broad hint, or was she intentionally and exceptionally dense?

“By the way,” continued Angel, “have you not a friend at Chitachar? I heard a lady mention that she had been your bridesmaid.”

“Oh, yes, my dear, pray don’t speak of her—such a dull creature, with a voice like a fog-horn. Philip, you remember Lucy Worsley at the Parsonage?”

“Oh, yes, of course I do. She was a good sort, and had a first-rate Airedale terrier.”

“She was densely stupid, and always had chilblains, even in summer. She is out here now, and telegraphed me to go and stay with her”—Mrs. Waldershare had made full inquiries respecting Chitachar;—“but I really cannot move again so soon.”

“What brought you out to India? What put it into your head to come East?”

“The instinct of exploration, I think; and I wanted so much to see dear old Edgar again, and”—with a crooked smile—“you. As one grows older, especially when one has no home or ties, one gets restless, and hankers for the friends of one’s childhood—don’t you think so, Mrs. Gascoigne?”

“No, I can’t say that I ever hankered after the friends of my childhood, except one,” she replied;

"I have four half-brothers, whom I never wish to see again."

Lola opened her eyes, until they looked a size larger, and gazed at Angel in astonishment, and then broke into a laugh.

"I suppose you had a different experience to mine—we had a very good time, had we not, Philip?" she appealed to him in her sweet, persuasive voice.

"Yes, we made things fairly lively for ourselves and others."

"It's one thing that cannot be taken from us—our memories. Do you remember the day the piebald pony ran away with us, and jumped the gate?"

"That is hardly a happy memory."

"No; but the picnics to Tancliffe Abbey, our cooking and dressing up—our—oh"—with a quick little gesture of abandonment—"our *everything*."

Gascoigne laughed. "We were awfully keen on half-raw potatoes, the cinders of birds, and corking our faces on the smallest provocation. How one's tastes change!"

"Aunt General Gascoigne, and dear Aunt Ven—how lovely she was," continued the guest. Philip shrank like a sensitive plant; he did not wish her to speak of his mother. Lola, with her quick perception, was instantly aware of this, and added in almost the next breath, "And do you remember the nest in the Clock Tower, that I dared you to get?"

Philip rose and said, "I am afraid I must remember events of to-day, and ask you to excuse me—I have to see the General before three. Angel and you can have a talk, and she will drive you home after tea."

"Oh, I cannot stay to-day, I've heaps to do," protested Lola piteously; "but I'll just smoke a cigarette with Mrs. Gascoigne—no, I really must call her Angel—I daresay she smokes?"

"I did," acknowledged Angel, "but I've given it up."

"Why?"

Angel made no reply beyond a laugh; she had given it up to please Philip. At last she said, "Well, I suppose we outgrow our habits."

"Do we? I never outgrow mine, and smoking gives us all the pleasures of hope and of memory. Let us sit in two corners of this sofa and talk; I do want to know you."

"It is very kind of you to say so," responded Angel quietly. Lola gave a long comprehensive glance round the luxurious room, and blew a cloud of smoke through her nostrils.

"You must be very well off," she remarked suddenly.

"We are," admitted her companion; "an old friend of Philip's mother, a lover, I believe, died a year ago, and left him three thousand a year."

"Nonsense," sitting erect; "fancy remaining in this country."

"Philip likes it—his heart is in his work. He would hate to retire, and just live in London clubs and in a house in Mayfair."

"What do you know of Mayfair?"

"Not much, but I lived there once." A pause, and then Angel suddenly said, "Please tell me about Philip's mother."

"Oh, Aunt Ven, as we called her. She was beau-

tiful; such a lovely face, a little sad—a good woman. It was said that in her first season, she took London by storm, also her second, and at the height of her glory she dropped out of the firmament; and was seen no more.”

“Was there not a reason?”

“None, beyond a mere surmise; people hinted at a love affair—and a mischief-maker. Ten years after she reappeared as Mrs. Gascoigne—married someone who did not expect a whole heart-devouring passion. Her son,” again that crooked smile, “you see has done the same.”

“You mean in marrying me,” said Angel quickly.

Lola pulled herself together. Had that glass of Burgundy gone to her head? She must be more wary. This kind of talk was so full of pitfalls.

“Of course,” she replied, taking Angel’s hand in hers, “you make him far happier than I could have done, and you are just the right age—the early twenties.”

“But you look in the twenties yourself. How do you manage it?”

“Oh, I try to get the very most out of life, by keeping in touch with what is pleasing. I never see or hear anything disagreeable—be gay, and you remain young.” And Lola released her companion’s fingers with a squeeze.

“But if you feel things terribly, and are sorry for people, and animals, and misery?”

“Oh, that is fatal, it means bad nights, and wrinkles, and horrors; I cannot afford to be emotional, I am a poor solitary woman. If you read sad books, and sing sad songs, and mix with sad people, you

become sad yourself. Do you know that you look rather sad—it was the first thing that struck me when I saw you.”

“Oh, but I’m not,” rejoined Angel, and the colour rose to her face; “I’m really supposed to be rather frivolous and——”

“And here is my gharry coming back,” interrupted the visitor, “and, alas! I must go. I’ll see you at the theatre this evening, won’t I? And you are going to see a great deal of *me*, dear. I hope you won’t mind.” As she spoke, Mrs. Waldershare embraced the astonished Angel with much *empressment*, went gracefully down the steps, ascended into her hired conveyance, and was presently rattled away.

CHAPTER XXXII

BY PROXY

IN a surprisingly short time, Mrs. Waldershare had become one of the most interesting personalities in Marwar. Her beauty, her toilettes, her seductive manners, her air of being accustomed to the best the world could offer, went far to promote her success. She was accepted at her own valuation, and incidentally as a very old friend of the Gascoignes, and was invited, *fêted*, admired, and imitated. The lady's victoria was surrounded at the band, or polo; men schemed and struggled for the honour of escorting her. She had graciously accommodated herself to the deficiencies of the Imperial Hotel, and established terms of intimacy with an exploring widow, with whom she chummed, and gave charming little teas, tiffins, and suppers. Mrs. Waldershare was extremely exclusive, and desired it to be understood that she only wished to know "the nicest people." As she was a regular attendant at church, and her air and deportment were unexceptional, "the nicest people" were delightful to cultivate her acquaintance.

It is needless to mention that they knew nothing of the little games of cards, which constituted such an attractive item at Mrs. Waldershare's evening reunions, nor dreamt that it was close on sunrise when they broke up, and that one or two of her guests returned to their quarters with lighter

pockets, and heavier hearts. There was never a whisper of these gatherings in society, only in the bazaar, where all is known, and where the fair widow was branded with a name that we will not set down here. Captain Hailes and Sir Capel Tudor were daily visitors at the Imperial Hotel; the former, on the strength of a distant cousinship, the latter simply because he had enjoyed the honour of being Mrs. Waldershare's fellow-passenger. He was a cheery, boyish little fellow of two-and-twenty, keenly anxious to see, and do everything. He and a friend had come out to India with the intention of indulging their mutual taste for sport and mountaineering, but Cupid had cast off his companion at Bombay, to follow the path of his enchantress.

In spite of his uproarious spirits, his round, boyish face, and curly locks, Sir Capel Tudor could be as doggedly obstinate as any commissariat mule; he was rich, he was his own master, and after a somewhat stormy scene at their hotel, the two comrades had parted, Sir Capel to come up country in order to visit Agra and Delhi and other historical places, and Mr. Hardy to coast down to Travancore, mentally cursing one particular young fool—and all widows.

* * * * *

Of course Mrs. Waldershare saw a good deal of the Gascoignes; she dined with them, drove with Mrs. Gascoigne, who admired her still—admired her graceful, gliding gait, her wonderful eyes, her wonderful gowns, her wonderful and irresistible ways.

Angel was always severely truthful to herself, and

she drew painful comparisons between Lola's beauty, her fresh, English complexion (oh, most innocent Angel, it was pain), her attractive manners, and her own white face, her dull wit, her inability to shine, or even to attempt to shine, when Lola was present; and what a fund of friends, experiences, and memories she and Philip had in common, events that had happened when she was in her ayah's arms—yes, and before she was born.

In this period, naturally the happiest of Philip's life, she had no share; and as the pair talked, drawn on from subject to subject, undoubtedly they sometimes forgot the third person, who sat half buried in sofa cushions, aloof and silent, telling herself that she, not Lola, was the outsider. She alone stood between Philip and this beautiful woman, with whom he had so much in common—youth, dead and living friends, memories, and first love. Angel had the power of keeping her feelings to herself, but she could not keep her misery entirely out of her face. Philip's anxious inquiries invariably met with a civil rebuff.

"You are as grave as a little old owl," he said one day. "I wish I knew what is the matter."

"Nothing."

"Is there such a thing as nothing?"

"Don't ask absurd questions; I suppose I may look pale if I please."

"But *I* don't please."

Angel quickly turned the conversation by a question:

"Do you know that Mrs. Gordon is really ill?"

"No; but I have not seen her about for ages—fever?"

"Yes; malarial fever. I believe she caught it in the district. I'm going over to visit her now."

"All right; I'll call for you on my way from the club."

"Oh, do go for a ride, and take Sam and John."

"I'll see them further! Sam has killed two of the young pigeons, and three of the Houdan chickens—quite a bag!"

"Yes; I shut him up in a godown for punishment."

"Much he cared."

"John cared. He sat outside and howled for an hour, and what do you think he did?"

"Something with respect to refreshments."

"Yes. He brought a bone and pushed it under the door."

"I'll bet it was well picked. Now, I am off. Let me know if I can do anything for Mrs. Gordon. You might take her over those new books and picture-papers—and give her my love."

"What will Mr. Gordon say?" and Angel gave a rather hysterical laugh.

"Why should he say anything? He knows very well that we *all* love her."

Mrs. Gordon had been keeping her room for some time, and received no one but Mrs. Gascoigne. She looked miserably ill, but refused to stay in bed; and as her husband did not believe in making a fuss over women, or in encouraging them to remain on the sick list and upset the house, the invalid was left a good deal alone.

Angel found her in her own special sanctum, wearing a soft silk tea-gown, and an expression of utter weariness and lassitude.

"Yes," she replied, in answer to her friend's exclamation, "I am indeed a wretched-looking specimen. I've had this fever before, and I know how it takes it out of me—between the fever in my blood, and the fever in my mind, I am almost extinct. See," and she held up an envelope, "he will keep on writing to me, although I never answer his letters. I think it is so cruel of him: and he comes here every day. His steamer leaves Bombay on Saturday, but he swears he will not leave India till he sees me again."

"Yes?"

"He will never see me again. No more than if I had died—I am dead, my heart is dead."

"Oh, Elinor, don't say that. You love me a little, and so many, many people love you."

"If they knew what you and I know, do you think they would love me?"

"Yes, and more than ever."

"But do you realise that I ache—yes, that is the word—to see Alan, to hear his voice, to look at him even once more—before he goes away," and her voice shook, "for ever? Do you know that I have written to him—oh, so many letters—mad, wild wicked letters, and destroyed them. I believe there is another spirit in my body, not the old restrained conscientious Elinor, but a mad, crazy spirit, who prates of love and the world well lost. Oh, my dear, you see in me a very sick woman mentally and physically—you are my doctor."

"What can I do for you?" and Angel laid her cool hand on her companion's burning head. "Tell me. I will do anything to help you."

"You can meet Alan—take him my good-bye to-morrow. Tell him he must leave on Saturday. People are all wondering why he stays on? and are looking about for the inducement. Tell him I shall often think of him, and pray for him, and pray that he may live a good unselfish life, share his wealth with others, and be happy. When we are old, old people we may perhaps meet—and that is all—except—good-bye."

"I will give him this message, and *how* he will hate me!"

"No, no, he likes you." A long pause, then with an abrupt change of tone, "And so Mrs. Waldershare is in Marwar?"

"Yes. She stayed for a few days with the Blaines, and now she has gone to the Imperial Hotel because she wishes to be independent."

"What is she like?"

"She is dazzlingly beautiful, with great dark eyes that seem to go right across her face."

"Yes, I hear she is very good-looking and alluring."

"And most fascinating; all the world admires her, and is making a fuss about her. We are giving a dinner for her to-morrow, and have asked the little baronet, and the Blaines, and Captain Hailes. Well, now, I must go; I hear Philip talking to your husband. What about to-morrow? When shall I see Mr. Lindsay? If he calls on me the servants will hear every word—our house is so open—

there are twelve doors in the drawing-room. We might walk in the garden if it——”

“I’ll tell you; drive down to the polo, and pick him up in your cart. I hate to ask you to do this for me—do you think your husband will mind?”

“Oh, no, Philip is never jealous, you know that—if the worst came to the worst, I’d tell him.” Mrs. Gordon sat up and gasped. “Yes, I would, Elinor, and I warn you beforehand. But I hope there is no question of that. I will meet Mr. Lindsay to-morrow, give him your message, and tell him that he must go home, that if he stayed here for years he would not see you, or hear from you again. I shall be firm. There,” and she kissed her companion’s hand, “I must go.”

The following afternoon Colonel Gascoigne returned home early, in order to take Angel for a ride; she looked wan and spiritless, like a flower that was drooping. He blamed himself for leaving her in that great empty bungalow; was it fair to her, to give up so much time to work, and leave her alone?

And there was something on her mind—what?

“Could it be—Alan Lindsay?” he asked himself; and a voice answered, “No; you deserve to be shot for the suspicion. Angel is not that sort.” No, retorted the little devil Jealousy; but most young women are “that sort,” when thrown for two months into the daily intimate, picturesque society of one of the most well-endowed and irresistible of men. With these voices still clamouring in his mental ears, he arrived at home, and was informed that “the Mem Sahib had gone out in the cart, and taken John Sahib and Sam Sahib towards the polo;” and

he turned his horse, and rode off in that direction. Angel was not at the polo, but Mrs. Waldershare was there. She beckoned him gaily to her victoria, in which sat two men, whilst a third worshipped upon the step.

"Where are you going to, Philip?" she inquired, with an air of playful authority.

"Only for a ride. Have you seen Angel?"

"Your good Angel—oh, yes. She drove away just now with such a nice-looking man! They went up the road towards the old palace. You don't mean to say you are going *too*?" and Lola gave a wicked little laugh; but Philip affected not to hear, and cantered off.

The palace was now used as a picture-gallery, it contained portraits of many rajahs and nawabs, and stood in a beautiful garden. It lay beyond the bazaars, about two miles from the polo. As Gascoigne rode along, his head was in a whirl, the hot blood was thumping in his heart. What did he mean to do? He could not say. He brought his horse to a walk, and made an effort to control his rage, and endeavoured to analyse his own sensations. What ailed him? Was this jealousy, or merely bad temper? As he came in sight of the gates, he descried the portly figure of John, just crossing the drive in chase of a squirrel. Yes, John had betrayed the whereabouts of his mistress, and there, by the palace entrance, stood her cart, pony, and syce. Meanwhile Angel had seen Alan Lindsay at the polo, and carelessly offered him a seat. As he accepted it with alacrity, she said:

"I have a message for you—several messages."

"Then don't deliver them here, for God's sake. Drive a bit up the road, where we can talk face to face."

"All right," she replied; "I'll go up as far as the Suchar Palace; the dogs love the gardens," and, as she spoke, Angel turned her pony's head, and drove rapidly away; all the time they flew along she never once opened her lips. Once at the palace, she sprang out, gave the reins to her syce, and said to her companion:

"Let us go into the gallery; we can talk there undisturbed," and she ran lightly up the stairs.

The gallery was lined on two sides with gorgeous portraits of princes in brocade, white muslin, steel armour, or jewels; but the couple never cast a glance at one of them, and Lindsay broke the silence by asking, in a hoarse voice:

"Now, what is her message? What does she wish you to say for her?"

"I am to say good-bye," replied Angel, looking at him steadfastly.

"I won't listen to it."

"You have no choice; you must. She implores you to go home at once. What is the use of remaining out here?"

"Because, even if I do not see her, I am near her—and that is something."

"It is madness. Will you not do as she wishes?"

"You know well that I would die for her."

"And she asks much less than your life—only to go—to go—to go."

"One would suppose you were talking to a dog!" he said angrily.

"I have a great respect for some dogs," replied Angel; "you have no respect for Elinor's wishes. Her mind is fixed, she will never see you again; will you force her to leave Marwar?"

"I wish I could force her to leave it with me."

"There, you waste your time and breath! She has a strong will, she is passionately sorry for herself and you—she is at the same time deeply humiliated to find that she, a married woman, could suffer such anguish. If you have any regard for her, any love for her, I beseech you to leave Marwar. She is ill, she is miserable, she—oh, if you only saw her as I saw her, you would never hesitate,—you cruel man."

By degrees Alan Lindsay, borne down by the force of Angel's arguments, her expostulations, her appeals, gave way. The dusk had suddenly fallen, as it does in India; these two, the pleader and the pleaded with, could hardly distinguish each other's features.

"Do you realise that I leave my heart—my very life—behind me?" he exclaimed.

"Yes, but you will be brave, you gain a victory; you will see it some day as I see it—you will go."

"Angel," said a voice from the dusk. It was her husband who spoke, he was close beside her, and she gave a perceptible start, but instantly recovering, rejoined, with surpassing nonchalance.

"Oh, is it you, Philip? How unexpected. Mr. Lindsay and I—have been looking at the pictures."

"Yes—that is evident to the meanest intelligence," replied Gascoigne, and his voice had a suppressed sound, and Angel for once distinguished a touch of sarcasm, never heard by her before.

CHAPTER XXXIII

EXPLANATION

"BUT you cannot study the Rajah's pictures any longer," continued Colonel Gascoigne, in a rough and dominant tone, and as he spoke he struck a match, and confronted, as he anticipated, Alan Lindsay—Mr. Lindsay, white as a ghost, and evidently shattered by some great mental storm.

"Shall we go home?" he suggested politely, as he struck another match, and lighted the way to the head of the stairs, the two picture-seers following him down in somewhat awed silence.

At the foot of the steps stood Angel's pony cart, with its lamps alight, and her husband's horse.

"Well, good-bye, Mr. Lindsay," she said in a cool, clear voice, as she turned to him in the entrance. "I will write to you sometimes. Philip, Mr. Lindsay is leaving for England."

"Good-bye, Gascoigne," he said hoarsely, and he held out his hand, but Colonel Gascoigne affected not to see it.

"Oh, good-bye," he said, shortly. "Angel, get in. I will drive you home"; to the syce, "bring on my horse." He whipped up the cob, and they flew down the avenue, leaving Alan Lindsay in the dim, dewy garden, to find his way back to the cantonment on foot and alone.

Colonel Gascoigne drove very fast, but he never uttered one word, nor did Angel. She was thinking

of the miserable man from whom she had been so unceremoniously parted, and a little of her husband. He was extremely angry; never had she known him to be angry, but Angel was not the least afraid of him. She had done nothing to be ashamed of, and once or twice she had felt a mad, almost uncontrollable desire to scream with laughter. Was Philip really jealous—at last? How funny!

Philip's head was seething with new ideas. He saw himself from a novel point of view, racked by many incongruous feelings—the furiously, justly incensed husband. Should he speak now? No, he would wait till after dinner, and then have it out with her.

He dashed up under the porch, alighted, handed out his wife with his usual courtesy, who walked up the steps without a word, and by the light of the great verandah lamp he caught a glimpse of her face; it recalled the Angel of Ramghur, when she was in one of her most defiant moods. They had a dinner-party that evening, and Mrs. Gascoigne, dressed with her accustomed taste, was exceptionally animated and gay, and played hostess to perfection. Certainly Angel, as of old, had a hard, fierce, untamed spirit; she met his glances without wincing, and they spoke, when occasion required, with Arctic politeness. Then when the last carriage had rumbled off, and his wife was trailing away to her room, Gascoigne came in from the verandah, and said:

“Stop—I wish to speak to you—Angel.”

“Yes?” The yes was interrogative—sinking gracefully into an easy-chair.

“I am not a jealous man,” he began, abruptly.

"Who said you were?" It was the Angel of Ramghur who retorted.

"I have"—struggling hard for complete self-command—"trusted you absolutely, as if you were my very right hand, and eyes——"

"But you could not believe your eyes this evening, I suppose?" she interrupted carelessly, and she looked up at him, and then at her white satin shoe.

"No, I returned home early to take you for a ride; I heard you had gone off towards the polo, and followed. At the polo, some one said, 'If you are looking for Mrs. Gascoigne, I saw her driving towards the Palace.' I came on, and discovered you there with—Lindsay—alone. I heard him say, 'I leave my heart—my life behind me,' and you answered, 'You will be brave—you will go.' He is going—you are to write to him. What does it all mean?—Angel—for God's sake—tell me the truth?"

"I invariably tell you the truth," she answered calmly; "they say that children and fools always do that—I wonder which I am?"

"But children and fools do *not* always tell the truth," he objected sharply.

"When did I ever tell you a lie?" she demanded, and her eyes clouded over,—sure prediction of a storm.

"Never, I must honestly admit. Do you—and here I ask a plain question—love Lindsay? He is handsome, he is fascinating, and madly in love—all this I am sane enough to see."

"You don't see much beyond your own nose in these matters," was Angel's unexpected rejoinder.

"At any rate, I won't see my name disgraced," he answered roughly.

"It is my name—as much as yours," she retorted haughtily. "What are you driving at?"

"Lindsay—is he—no, I can't say it!"

"I should hope not. My fancy flies with yours, you see. I am sorry you are so much annoyed."

"Annoyed!" he repeated.

"Then the expression is inadequate; I conclude—that words fail you. You wish to ask me if Alan Lindsay is my lover? Is that what you desire to express?"

He nodded his head.

"He was out in camp with me for two months."

"He was."

"If I tell you a secret will you swear to keep it?"

"Your secrets are generally startling, but on the present occasion who runs may read. Lindsay was in camp with you for two months; picturesque surroundings, propinquity, a very pretty married woman—I see it all—he made love to you."

"Wrong—guess again."

"Why guess—there was no one else."

"Pray, what do you call Mrs. Gordon?"

"I call her the best woman I have ever known—surely her influence——"

Angel raised her slender white hand in protest, and said:

"Here is my secret—please keep it. Alan Lindsay is in love—with Mrs. Gordon."

"*Angel!*" cried her husband, with a vehemence that brought Sam out of his bed, and caused the ayah to creep to a doorway.

"It is perfectly true," she continued calmly. "He is madly, wildly, irretrievably devoted to her."

"And she?" with an incredulous jeer.

"The same. It dawned upon me when I was in camp; I saw it coming long before it occurred to them—I was always sharp, you know."

Colonel Gascoigne suddenly sat down and rested his elbow on the table, and stared hard at his wife. His mind was a battlefield of conflicting ideas. Angel had never told him an untruth—no, not even at Ramghur; and, as for Mrs. Gordon, had she not years of good deeds to speak for her?

"They are absolutely suited to each other," continued Angel, suddenly changing her position; she no longer lounged with crossed knees, dangling arms, and a swinging little satin-clad foot. She sat up, leant forward with clasped hands and expressive eyes—"yes, they are made for one another—their ideas and tastes are identical, but that wooden old wretch, who always recalls the god Odin to me, sits between them and bars their road to happiness." She drew a long breath. "Yes," and her voice thrilled strangely, her colour rose and her eyes flashed, "it seems a perfectly hopeless muddle; there are two lives wrecked for a life which is selfish, stolid, emotionless, and cruel. If *I* were Elinor, I should run away with Alan Lindsay; why should I sacrifice everything to a greedy, solid block of self, who merely regards his wife as a cook-housekeeper, without wages—a housekeeper who may never dare to give warning?"

Gascoigne sat up electrified; was this fiercely

eloquent, passionate, beautiful creature the rather languid, limp, everyday Angel?

"You look amazed," she cried triumphantly, "and well you may. Am I not preaching heresy, I, a married woman? Since I have told you so much, I will tell you more. She"—throwing out her arms dramatically—"would have gone off with Alan only for me." Gascoigne stared at his wife; he could not speak.

"I am much stronger than I look," resumed Angel; "who would believe that I, who am but two-and-twenty, could influence Mrs. Gordon, who, as you once boasted to me, could influence a province!"

"Who, indeed?" he echoed; but when he saw Angel in this exalted mood he was prepared to believe in her victories.

"She was only drawn gradually to the brink, inch by inch, step by step; and, oh, she struggled so hard. Alan Lindsay is clever, plausible, eloquent. I found her on the brink; I sounded the recall—the trumpet of the assembly of good people, in her ear. I dragged her back by moral force."

"Yes?"

"She is nearly dead, she is in a state of mental collapse, the fight was so desperate, the struggle betwixt love and duty so severe. *I* fought for duty," and Angel nodded her head at her stupefied listener. "I'm not sure that I shall do it always—I fought well—I turned the tide of battle. Alan Lindsay has accepted his dismissal and his fate. As a small, small alleviation, he may write to *me*."

There was a long pause, broken only once more

by the girl's thin, clear voice inquiring: "What have you got to say to me, Philip?"

He rose with a sudden impulse and came towards her.

"I say—that you are an Angel—a wingless Angel," and he stooped down and kissed her.

"So much for jealousy!" she exclaimed, and laughed.

CHAPTER XXXIV

A REFUGEE

It was seven o'clock in the morning, and under the neem trees at the far side of the parade-ground, Mrs. Gordon and Mrs. Gascoigne are walking their horses side by side. The former has completely recovered from her sharp attack of fever, though her face is worn, and bears the trace of suffering. She always appeared to great advantage in the saddle, and sits her powerful black New Zealander with the ease of a finished horsewoman. Mrs. Gordon is Irish.

Angel, looking slim and girlish, is mounted on an excitable chestnut, stud-bred, called Carrots, who keeps snatching alternately at his bridle, and snapping at his neighbour—although they are old friends, were out in camp together, and have travelled many miles in company.

"I have a piece of news for you, Angel," said Mrs. Gordon. "I was coming round to tell you, when we met. Donald has suddenly made up his mind to go home for six months."

"Oh, Elinor! what you have been longing for the last three years. You want a change—I am so glad—and so sorry."

"It was all thought of in the usual Indian eleventh hour scramble; Donald finds he can get leave, and he is suddenly seized with a desperate desire to see his book in print—the idea has been simmering for

a long time, last night it came to a boil. He wired for our passages in the *Caledonia* for next Friday."

"Next Friday—so soon?"

"Yes; and he has written to Alan Lindsay, telling him to meet us. He thinks he will be so useful to him about publishing the book—and——"

"And?" said Angel, interrogatively.

"To Donald's surprise, I have decided to remain out here, and spend the hot weather at Almora with the Byrnes."

Angel pushed back her Terai hat with her whip hand, and stared fixedly at her friend.

"Mary Byrne is so delicate, and she has those four children to look after—my god-child, the eldest little thing, is a cripple. No, I am not going home."

"I believe you are right," announced Angel, after a pause; "but oh! what a terrible disappointment—think of your people."

"I do think of them—and of many other things. I am always thinking now. I wish to be a happy old woman—if ever I am an old woman—to try and be faithful to my ideals, and to do my duty—nothing else matters."

"Do you believe in the doctrine of compensation? If you don't have some things—there are others?"

"It would be a compensation, if you came to Almora, Angel."

Angel shook her head. She was engaged with her irritable young horse, who, maddened by a fly, had broken into a mad frenzy of kicking, culminating in two passionate buck jumps.

"He wants a good bucketing," said Mrs. Gordon; "you should take him round the racecourse."

"I should," agreed his rider, a little out of breath, "but it's too late this morning. Have you seen Mrs. Waldershare yet?"

"Yes; I returned her visit yesterday."

Angel's eyes instantly asked a dozen questions, in reply to which Mrs. Gordon said: "I do not admire her."

"But don't you see that she is beautiful?"

"I see that she is a woman of the world. I can understand her attraction for some, but I don't care for a slow, coiling manner, or that crooked smile and drawl."

"Oh, Elinor, I've never known you so prejudiced," protested her companion; "she sacrificed herself——"

"To marry a millionaire," interrupted Mrs. Gordon.

"And she has been so nice to me."

Mrs. Gordon glanced quickly at Angel. Where were her keen susceptibilities? what had become of her usually sharp sight? How had this good-looking, ingratiating, self-seeking widow managed to throw dust in those clear eyes?

"So you don't like her," said Angel; "now I wonder why? You generally classify people so indulgently—where would you place Mrs. Waldershare?"

"In the reptile house at the Zoo!" was the startling rejoinder. "I do not often take a dislike to people, but when I do it is invincible." In answer to her friend's face of blank astonishment, she continued: "I sincerely hope you won't see much of her, Angel?"

"I cannot see much of her, even if I would, if that

is any relief to your mind, for I am going into Garhwal with Philip."

"Ah, that would not be in her trail; she would not care for roughing it in a hut on buffaloes' milk and goats' flesh. Dear me, how vindictive I am," she exclaimed with a laugh. "I wonder if I am growing bitter in my old age?" Then, in a different tone, she continued: "How I shall miss you, dear; you have been my life preserver. I was swept away into very dark waters, which nearly closed over me. Now I have struggled back to land, and I believe I shall see the sun once more."

"You will enjoy a great deal of sunshine yet, I hope," said Angel, fervently.

"Reflected only," she answered, "but quite as much as I deserve. To descend from these metaphors, this morning's sun is getting too strong, I must go in. I'll come round and see you this evening," and, with a wave of her whip, Mrs. Gordon turned homewards; and Angel, giving Carrots his head at last, galloped across the parade-ground at full speed. When she had gone more than half-way, she descried a man, followed by two small white objects. It was Philip, returning from the brigade office on foot. He signalled with his hand, which was full of officials, and she charged up to him at once.

"Have your orders come?" she asked anxiously.

"No, but I expect them hourly. It is too late for you to be out this hot morning, and high time you were up in the hills."

"Yes, in Garhwal—remember your promise, Phil."

"You may follow later, but I could not possibly take you *now*."

"Why not?"

"I shall have to make arrangements, and put up some kind of a house. Angel, I warn you most solemnly that the life will be monotonous; you won't like it—you have evolved an elysium out of your imagination. The reality is—Tartar faces, Tartar fare, forbidding, barren mountains, and a distinct flavour of central Asian squalor."

"So much the better," she answered recklessly. "I want to break new ground, and explore a land beyond curling-pins and fashions; I am longing for a change."

"*That* you may certainly reckon on."

"I don't want a pretty hill station, with bands, and garden parties, and three posts a day. I wish to get away from every one, among the wild, bare mountains, catch the spirit of your work, and perhaps overtake an adventure."

"Or be overtaken by one, in the shape of a bear or a landslip. Well, I suppose you must have your way. I have arranged to rent Rockstone, the Warings' house at the Chotah Bilat—you know it. It is very pretty and secluded, sufficiently aloof from the madding crowd, and close to the Colliers, who will look after you. By the end of May I shall either come and fetch you or send a strong escort to bring you into Garhwal. How will that suit you, Mrs. G.?"

"I suppose it will have to do," she answered, discontentedly; "but I shall loathe being up at Bilhat by myself."

"Perhaps you can find some companion—Mrs. Gordon?"

"No, I've just been talking to her. Odin is taking six months' leave to England, and she is going to Almora to do children's maid, and sick nurse."

"Penance," muttered Gascoigne under his breath. "Hullo, I say—what are *we* overtaking?" and he pointed to a large bullock cart which had just turned into their gate. It was heavily laden with boxes and trunks of all shapes and descriptions. On the summit of the pile a steamer chair was poised precariously, on which we can distinguish (though they cannot) the name "Waldershare" in full-sized letters. A sharp-looking, elderly maid, carrying a white umbrella, and a square green crocodile case, followed the luggage on foot.

"Oh, some mistake," said Angel carelessly—"the wrong bungalow."

"By the way, I have a note for you," said Colonel Gascoigne, suddenly searching among the papers in his hand. "I forgot all about it—a peon came with it to the office; he said it was important," and as he spoke he handed it up.

"Why, it's from Mrs. Waldershare," exclaimed Angel when she had torn it open and glanced at the contents. She pushed her hat to the back of her head—a trick of hers—pulled Carrots to a standstill, and read it aloud.

"DEAR ANGEL—You will be a good Angel to me, and take me under your wing, when I tell you that there is a case of small-pox in the hotel compound, a disease of which I have an unspeakable horror. I

know you have an empty spare room and I am sure that Philip would not like to feel that his old play-mate was enduring misery and risking danger. I have packed and sent off my luggage. Do please say I may come at once.—Your terrified, LOLA.”

“Well?” said Angel, as she concluded, and looked down into Philip’s eyes.

“Of course your terrified Lola must come at once; we will send the carriage over for her. I had no idea there was small-pox in the station. The sooner you are off the better.”

“And pray, what can I do with Mrs. Waldershare?” she inquired, stuffing the note into her saddle pocket.

“Oh, she is bound to have made her own plans. By Jove, here she comes in one of the hotel victorias.”

* * * * *

After hastily welcoming her guest, Mrs. Gascoigne hurried away to make her arrangements for Lola, her maid, and her belongings, leaving the two old play-fellows *tête-à-tête* in the verandah. Mrs. Waldershare was suitably dressed in a cool white cambric, and a shady hat; a great bunch of heliotrope was stuck in her belt. Her face was pathetically pale, and her dark eyes were tragic, as she turned to her host and said, with a quick, dramatic gesture:

“Oh, it is too bad of me to take you by storm in this way, but I am such a miserable coward; though if anything did happen to me, there is no one to care now,” and her voice sank. “It is such a misfortune

that Edgar is on the march, and here I am, left adrift."

"You must not talk like this, Lola," interrupted Philip. "I am glad you came to us,—you know you are welcome here. Don't trouble your head, but make yourself at home. Angel will be delighted to have you. We were only saying a few minutes ago that she must have a companion when I go away."

"Oh," with a little gasp, "when are you going?"

"In a day or two, on duty into Garhwal, and Angel will be all by herself, at any rate, until she goes to the hills."

* * * * *

An hour later, Mrs. Waldershare, having seen her dresses unpacked, her odds and ends arranged, and written off half-a-dozen notes—announcing her change of address—dismissed Tile, her maid, and threw herself down on a lounge with a sigh of inexpressible satisfaction.

Yes, she had managed it capitally, taken the position at a rush—"now established here," and she glanced round the comfortable bedroom; "here" she determined to remain.

"*J'y suis et j'y reste*," she murmured to herself with a smile. What had become of the pale, distraught, excited, and apologetic Lola?

Philip was perfectly right when he declared that Lola was certain to have made her plans, but if he had been an accomplished thought-reader, and been able to fathom them, his surprise would have been unbounded.

Mrs. Waldershare's small supply of funds was ebbing rapidly; to live in a suitable style, which in-

cludes a maid, a carriage, and constant little dinners, costs a considerable sum even in India; and at hotels, of course, it is a matter of ready money. The last week's bill had proved a disagreeable surprise; the manager had thrown out hints respecting late parties, and declared that other residents had complained of loud talking, and carriage wheels, at unusual hours.

Mrs. Waldershare's reply was extremely dignified and crushing, but she realised that it was time to execute a fresh manœuvre. People were beginning to talk of moving to the hills; what was to become of her? Moneyless, friendless, abandoned on the plains? Edgar had written such a cool letter, announcing that he was sending his wife home, and spending the hot weather in Seetapore, where, if she liked, Lola could join him. In one sense, there could hardly be a warmer invitation! But this scheme did not commend itself to his sister, who lay with her eyes half-closed lazily contemplating her castles in the air. The Gascoignes were wealthy and liberal (so every one said); generosity undoubtedly begins with old friends. She would lay herself out to cultivate Angel—she would be cautious; she resolved to walk, so to speak, on tip-toe, so as never to awaken the young woman's dormant jealousy, which she instinctively felt would be easily aroused. She and Philip would be on "brother and sister," "old friends" footing; indeed, Philip was now so cool, so detached, so indifferent, she could hardly bring herself to believe that he had ever been her lover, and that she might have been his wife for years and years, the mistress of this charming house. No, she

and this Philip would never have assimilated; he was much too masterful, too strait-laced, and too austere.

She would play her cards carefully, with Angel; there must be fewer cigarettes, and French novels, and *no* roulette. As the older and more experienced woman, she would influence her, and once they were alone, she would gradually assume the lead, gain her confidence, and learn her secrets; later on, accompany her to the delightful little chalet that she heard had been rented in the hills, mix with the gay throng, and marry. Possibly little Cupid—unless she could do better,—and return home, Lady Tudor. All this would cost her nothing but a little care, a little flattery, and a certain amount of invention. With these satisfactory arrangements in her mind, Mrs. Waldershare's eyes gradually closed, and she fell asleep into a deep and refreshing slumber.

Before proceeding further, it may as well be stated that the small-pox scare proved to be completely unfounded and was subsequently traced to Mrs. Waldershare's ayah, who waited on that lady's lady's-maid.

CHAPTER XXXV

A GOOD BILLET

THE unexpected guest, pleading a nervous headache (the result of fright), did not appear at tiffin, but emerged later in the afternoon, wearing a subdued expression, and a fantastic loosely-fitting garment, which gave the uninitiated occasion to marvel how it was put on? and why it did not come off? It was a confection from Paris, more suitable to a Parisian artiste than a respectable British widow, and the dogs looked at each other and winked.

"I just slipped into this," explained Lola to her hostess. "It is so deliciously light—quite the latest thing in tea-gowns," and she sank into a chair with a complacent sigh.

"Oh, is it really? I thought it was a *sauté du lit*."

"You can have it copied if you like," kindly ignoring such deplorable ignorance.

"Thank you," said Angel, demurely, "but it is not a style which would suit me."

"No, dear, perhaps you *are* a little too thin. I see you are having tea out here," continued the uninvited guest. "How delightful! I daresay some of my friends will drop in to inquire how I got over my scare—you won't mind?"

"No, of course not; I shall be delighted to see them. Excuse me for a moment, while I take this telegram to Philip," and Mrs. Waldershare was left for a moment alone with Sam and John.

They both disliked her most cordially. She jeered at John, and made rude remarks about his figure—he was extremely sensitive to ridicule. She sat in Sam's favourite chair, and had once flung him off her lap with a violence that hurt him. Then they abhorred the atmosphere of heliotrope and pearl powder, and felt instinctively that the intruder hated animals, and was a "human" to be most carefully avoided. As they sat glaring at the interloper, and exchanging their opinions of her, the lady's friends appeared in a hired landau, Sir Capel, General Bothwell, and Mrs. Alley-Lacy, who was profanely known as Mrs. Laissez-Aller, an exuberant, talkative woman of uncertain age and proclivities, but who was obviously rich, agreeable, and beautifully dressed, and had come to India, she declared, solely on account of her health. She could not endure the English climate, and India was an interesting change from Egypt, where she had wintered hitherto. Mrs. Lacy might be classed as "an hotel lady," for she had no permanent home and no permanent ties, and seemed well acquainted with all the principal hosteleries in Europe.

The third visitor was General Bothwell, retired; a wiry, dapper little man, with a large authoritative-looking nose, a voice to correspond, and a pointed snow-white beard. He entertained an extremely high opinion of R. Bothwell, K.C.B., who once upon a time had carried out an insignificant but successful expedition—and had lived upon his reputation ever since. He was a terrible correspondent, the high priest of bore, and his chief enjoyment in life consisted in asking questions, expounding his

views, and proclaiming what ought to be done under certain circumstances. He had mentally conducted every recent campaign, and, according to his own account, all the chief men at the War Office were his personal friends, and he was their valuable adviser. A widower with ample means, and ample time on his hands, he had just run down to re-visit his old haunts in order to ascertain how the great Indian Empire was getting on without him. The General had made Mrs. Waldershare's acquaintance at the Imperial Hotel and admired her from a paternal standpoint; her attitude to him and others was that of serene friendliness and warm interest.

"Oh, how could you desert us, Mrs. Waldershare?" said Sir Capel, accosting her dramatically.

"See, we have all come in a body to take you back," added Mrs. Lacy, with a careful kiss.

"You have stolen a march," proclaimed the General; "these are comfortable free quarters—a good billet. Better than the Imperial!"

"Yes; the Gascoignes have been most pressing," said Lola; "so kind. They were greatly averse to my staying at an hotel."

She paused. The couple were coming out on the verandah, to find her and the table thus surrounded. After a few minutes' greetings and talk, General Bothwell said:

"So I hear you are off, Gascoigne. I met Hawkins at the gate, and he told me."

"Yes; I've had a wire, and I leave to-morrow for Garhwal."

"About this lake scare—most unnecessary fuss, don't you think so, eh?"

"No; I'm on the other tack—better be sure than sorry."

"Please do explain all about it," said Mrs. Lacy; "I am so interested."

"The explanation is, that an enormous landslip has dammed up a large valley, and a mountain river, and turned it into a lake, five miles long and four hundred feet deep."

"That's big enough for canoeing," remarked Sir Capel.

"It's filling at the rate of three feet a day, and as soon as the water reaches the top of the dam—say in a month or six weeks—the dam will burst and flood a hundred and fifty miles of country."

"What a sight it will be! I'd give a lot to see it," said Sir Capel. "Niagara broke loose in India."

"It will certainly be an unprecedented sight."

"And what measures are you engineer chaps taking?" inquired General Bothwell, with his mouth full of bread and butter.

"Merely precautions. We cannot let the water off under control; all we can do is to ensure that it escapes down the river bed—without loss of life."

"Can't be many lives to lose up there," he argued.

"Yes; besides the villagers, there are thousands of pilgrims who pass down to Hurdwar in May and June, and we are bound to know to a day—in fact, to an hour—when the flood is due."

"What can you do?"

"We have established a temporary telegraph line from the lake to ten stations where pilgrims halt, and at good points, from which to control the traffic. Pillars are erected every half-mile to show the safe

limits out of reach of the flood, and all the principal bridges are being dismantled. As soon as the water reaches the crest of the dam, the official in charge will send a warning telegram, for the flood will travel fast."

"I suppose the natives are terrified out of their senses?" asked Mrs. Lacy.

"No, not in the least; they think it will pass quietly over the river bed, and this is the view of the pilgrims, who are furious because their ordinary route is forbidden."

"By Jove, and I don't wonder," said General Bothwell, combatively. "Instead of arranging for the outlet of the water, a telegraph line has been erected—no doubt at immense cost—to apprise people of the danger of a flood which may come in a month, a year—or never!" and he laughed derisively. "I think, whoever has hit on the *telegraph* as a means of dealing with an engineering difficulty, will look uncommonly foolish."

"I am the culprit," coolly confessed Gascoigne. "To divert the lake otherwise would cost two million of rupees; India is poor, and there is not time to erect masonry weirs, outfalls, and shoots."

"And so," said Sir Cupid, "you have resolved to let it slide? And you believe there will be a big flood?"

"Yes, I am sure of it," replied Gascoigne, with emphasis.

"How I should like to see it."

"I shall see it," announced Angel. "Philip has promised to take me with him."

"Much against his will," he supplemented, with a laugh.

"But I am going in spite of him," she answered, with a glance of gay defiance. "I was born in the Himalayas; I am a hill woman."

"Yes; that is certain," said Sir Capel, promptly.

"Pray, how do you know?"

"Because you are not a plain woman."

"How can you be so ridiculous?" she remonstrated, impatiently.

"Surely you are not going off immediately," said Mrs. Alley-Lacy, "to see this wonderful dam?" bringing out the last word with considerable unction.

"No, not just yet. I wish I were!"

"And what will become of you?"

"Mrs. Gascoigne and I are going to look after one another," volunteered Mrs. Waldershare, laying her hand on Angel's arm with an air of affectionate proprietorship. "I shall take care of her. She is left in my charge, is she not, Philip?" and she appealed to him with her eloquent eyes.

Philip was considerably taken aback, but he rallied with his usual elasticity, and said:

"Oh, Angel has an old head on young shoulders. I shall make her responsible for the house—and I shall ask Padre Eliot to keep an eye on both of you."

"Well, Gascoigne," said General Bothwell, standing up and shaking crumbs out of his beard, "I must confess that I am amused at this scheme of yours—I don't believe in scaring people, you know. I think you are on the wrong tack—the wrong tack—but

you Engineer chaps are, in my experience, the most pig-headed branch of the service."

"Still, sir, I think you must admit that we earn our bread and butter?"

"Butter—oh, yes!—you get more than enough of that," retorted the General, pointedly.

"You won't get any butter in Garhwal," announced Sir Capel, "of any sort or kind; only black bread and cucumbers—awful grub! I've been up reading a lot about this water-shoot—all the same I wish you'd take me with you, Gascoigne."

"In what capacity?"

"Oh, as dhoby, dog boy, special correspondent—anything," and Sir Capel put his hands together, and his head on one side, and looked extremely ridiculous.

"No, no, my dear fellow," rejoined Gascoigne with a laugh, and a significant glance at Mrs. Waldershare. "How could the ladies spare you?"

In two days' time Colonel Gascoigne had left home, and Angel for once was not disconsolate. She analysed her feelings, dug down deeply into her motives, and the sensation she there discovered was not sorrow, but relief. She had been dimly aware of a vague uneasiness, an intangible dread of developments. All this was at an end now.

CHAPTER XXXVI

JOINT HOSTESS

AND thus Mrs. Waldershare was established as Mrs. Gascoigne's chaperone and companion; and the station, who considered it a most excellent arrangement, and but yet another proof of her husband's good sense, cried Wah! wah! They had been duly informed of the ancient friendship which had existed between his parents and Mrs. Waldershare's. There was no mention of a love affair—crafty Lola had set back the intimacy a whole generation—it was discreetly cloaked in the mantle of years. Mrs. Nobbs, who acted as spokeswoman for Mrs. Grundy, eagerly assured every one she met that she highly approved of the move. It was most unbecoming (favourite word) for a young married woman to be left alone, and Mrs. Waldershare was such a quiet, sensible, charming chaperone,—and so clever. Truly she was marvellously clever; in some gradual, inexplicable fashion, she assumed the lead of the household. Yes, without sound, or beat of drum. She was joint hostess, not guest; there was a solid, resistless force in her character that Angel was powerless to combat. At early morning, or afternoon tea, it was no uncommon thing for her to find Mrs. Waldershare already seated before the teapot. This position carries a certain status with it, and Lola's visitors

went so far as to assume from the air of nonchalant hospitality with which she offered cream and cakes, that she was "sharing expenses."

This was precisely how she wished it to be understood. To Angel, a sort of guest at her own table, she offered playful apologies, and assurances that "she was the best tea maker in England, and liked to save her dear child trouble."

But there was one lady who regarded the new *ménage* with the gravest misgivings, and this was Mrs. Gordon, who, before departing to the hills, had confided her fears to Padre Eliot.

"I do not trust Mrs. Waldershare," she said.

"Why not?" he asked, "she is quiet, and handsome, and ladylike."

"She is a clever, crafty woman, not too scrupulous in money matters. I believe"—lowering her voice—"that she gambles! Of course, I have no business to have prejudices and to hear gossip."

"It is not like you, certainly," he said, with his broad smile. "I believe there has been gambling in the station somewhere, recently; one or two boys have been hard hit,—but why suspect a lady?"

"It is more than suspicion. How I wish Colonel Gascoigne had not left Angel with that woman. It is like leaving a lamb to a wolf."

"She shall not devour her—I'll see to that," he said, playfully.

"No, but she will use her as her blind, and her banker."

"Well, I think you may trust Mrs. Gascoigne," he said, "her conduct has always given evidence of extraordinary good sense, and a certain amount

of latent force." As Mrs. Gordon had excellent reason to acquiesce in this dictum, she was silent.

But her instinct had not deceived her, day by day—nay, hour by hour, Angel fell more and more under the elder woman's influence. It was as if she had been hypnotised, she surrendered her will to her, and took up a subordinate position with unquestioning resignation. Although the clever widow was careful not to offend any of the girl's prejudices and susceptibilities, the household was ordered to Mrs. Waldershare's liking,—and the servants hated her almost as bitterly as the dogs. Never put out, never excited, the lady rolled along over all little obstacles, a veritable Juggernaut of self. She instituted late hours—Angel was naturally an early bird. She enjoyed elaborate and dainty meals, Angel preferred very simple fare; she liked long drives in the moonlight, sometimes keeping the horses out till midnight; occasionally she took Mrs. Lacy with her, or Sir Capel, and Angel remained at home. Lola was so clever, so seductive, so persuasive, that everything she said or did had the air of being absolutely faultless—the one and only speech or action possible under the circumstances.

She and her hostess sat a good deal together in the darkened drawing-room, for now that the weather was warmer, punkahs were moving, "tatties" were installed. Mrs. Waldershare knitted silk ties and socks with firm white fingers, whilst Angel drew, and sometimes they scarcely exchanged a word in an hour. Lola was not talkative, she never talked simply for the sake of con-

versation. Her silence impressed Angel far more than speech; she felt that Lola could tell her so much if she would, yes, so much about Philip, and she was sensible of a certain awe, and the strivings and painful contortions of a never-to-be appeased curiosity, and what was worse, a sleepless jealousy. She was humbly conscious that she was far inferior to this calm, beautiful, dignified creature, and as she stole long glances at her companion, she would tell her envious heart that Philip had been engaged to her for four years, twice as long as she had been his wife. He had known Lola for thirty years! How could a man outgrow a love like that? It was rooted in his very childhood. Lola had some dim intuition of what was passing in her companion's thoughts, and smiled, saying to herself, "Silly girl, she is always wondering. How wretched I could make her if I chose!"

Although the station was emptying, there were still a number of people in Marwar, and Mrs. Gascoigne, at Mrs. Waldershare's suggestion, had a few friends to dinner now and then. On the occasion of Lola's birthday—so-called—Angel gave a little party and asked the heroine of the occasion to invite her own guests. Mrs. Lacy, Sir Capel, Captain Hailes, and the General were among these, and the little affair went off admirably. As usual, all the organisation and trouble were Angel's share; she took great pains with the menu, the menu cards, and the flowers (Lola was so critical), whilst Lola had, as customary, all the enjoyment. She was arrayed in a marvellous and filmy gown, and wore a beautiful

diamond heart and arrow—surprisingly similar to one that Crackett, the Delhi hawker, had been offering for sale. Her health was drunk, and she made a pretty speech. After dinner, there was music, and at eleven o'clock the General and several others took their departure. Then Mrs. Waldershare, with a widely encompassing flash of her dark eyes, suggested "Cards," adding "the night is just beginning." Angel's pale face expressed not merely fatigue but dismay, and her friend exclaimed, "No, no, dear—we won't bore you. You look so tired, Mrs. Lacy will excuse you, won't you?" appealing to that lady, who replied:

"Certainly, I hope Mrs. Gascoigne will not be ceremonious with me."

"And I'll play hostess, and see them off the premises," said Lola, playfully. Accepting this assurance, and offering many apologies, Angel, who had a bad neuralgic headache, thankfully retired to bed, and after a long time fell asleep. She seemed to have slept for hours when she awoke with a violent start, aroused by a sound like the overturning of a chair. Could it be burglars? She sat up and listened with a beating heart. Then she heard a cock crow—it must be close on dawn. She struck a match, lighted a candle, jumped out of bed, and got into her dressing-gown, and waited. Surely there were steps and voices outside; was it in the ante-room, or where? Had she obeyed her first impulse, and gone into the drawing-room, she would have discovered the card-

party, consisting of four men and two ladies, just breaking up. They had risen from the table.

"Look here," said Lola, carelessly handing a bit of notepaper to Captain Hailes. "I make it that."

He glanced at the total, and became suddenly white—nay, grey—but rallied, and said, "It's all right, I expect."

"Been hard hit, eh, Hailes?" enquired the little baronet, playfully. "I come off only seventy to the bad."

Yes, they had been gambling; and how dissipated it all looked, the candles flaring in their sockets, the lamps smoking, tablecloth awry, and cards scattered over the floor.

Angel, who had looked at her watch, and seen that the hour was four o'clock, came out into the ante-room, candle in hand. Here she was suddenly confronted by a figure with a shawl over her head—Tile.

"Oh, what is the matter?" she enquired, breathlessly.

"I've been feeling so ill, ma'am," she moaned, "such a turn as I've had. It's this climate as does not suit me. I feel like dying and I was—coming to ask if you had such a thing as a medicine chest?"

"Of course I have," replied Mrs. Gascoigne, profoundly relieved; "it is in my own room. Come with me and I will doctor you," turning back as she spoke. "How do you feel?"

"All cold and shivers like—and a sort of quaking in my inside."

"Oh then, perhaps," opening a cupboard, "this

cordial will do you good. At least it will do you no harm." As Angel spoke, she seized a bottle, and a measuring-glass.

By-and-bye, as Tile crept stealthily to her own quarters, she encountered her mistress, who had been extinguishing lamps and candles, and setting the drawing-room straight.

"I met her in the doorway," she whispered with a scared face. "I told her I was took ill, and she gave me a cordial—she is as innocent as a lamb."

"My goodness!" exclaimed Mrs. Waldershare, her eyes widening in alarm, "that *was* a narrow escape."

CHAPTER XXXVII.

INTO GARHWAL

ROCKSTONE Chotah-Bilat, the joint address of Mrs. Gascoigne and Mrs. Waldershare, was a large well-appointed bungalow, over-looking the prettiest side of the station, approached through a steep terraced garden, full of great bushes of ancient geraniums, and straggling rose trees, and flanked by a few pines.

The house was sufficiently roomy to accommodate half a dozen people; and here the two inmates lived their separate lives, together and yet apart. The partnership was so harmonious as to excite a certain degree of admiration as well as envy; for it is a painful fact that these house-sharing schemes are not invariably a success.

Mrs. Waldershare was charmed with what she termed "a Himalayan Paradise"; her own chief friends were comfortably established at the Casino Hotel, or the Club, and she made a number of new acquaintances. The constant whirl of picnics, tiffins, dinners, dances, incidental to a gay hill station, the opportunity of exhibiting her toilettes, of living without expense, and of enjoying an occasional "game"—all this comprised a phase of existence supremely to Lola's taste. She possessed her own roulette board, and both board and owner were in flattering request. The board accompanied Mrs. Waldershare to luncheon parties, and to teas and dinners at "the Wigwam," and elsewhere. The Wigwam was a pretty little

house, occupied by a smart married couple, much given to play of every description; their gay suppers were notorious, and their guests might have been discovered guiltily creeping in to their respective homes, with the dawn. Angel had not paid the usual round of calls, or embarked on the flood-tide of entertainments. She felt no inclination to dance, and suffered from constant neuralgia, and depression. One or two of her friends had sought her, but she declined their invitations; and when a lady resides in an out-of-the-way locality, in a sequestered bungalow, and is disinclined to entertain, or to be entertained, people in the full swing of the season have no leisure to cultivate such a recluse—and leave her severely alone. Mrs. Gascoigne was to be seen at church (at St. John's, in the Wilderness) on Sunday; on week days, rambling far along the unfrequented hill-tracks, merely accompanied by two dogs. To Angel's intimates, Mrs. Waldershare professed a devoted attachment to the dear, sweet girl, a keen anxiety respecting her health, and declared that she was "just a little bit run down," all this being accompanied by effusive encomiums. To her own circle she proclaimed that her housemate was "peculiar." This, with a significance that led strangers to suppose that Mrs. Gascoigne was eccentric to the verge of imbecility. Lola's manner to Angel was perfect. A mixture of the tender elder sister, and the sincerely attached friend; but she and her hostess did not see much of one another, except at breakfast. Soon after this meal, Mrs. Waldershare's gaily-costumed jampannies (they wore black and yellow livery, and

yellow turbans) carried their charming burden away for the whole day, she merely returning home in order to dress, or occasionally to receive the General and Sir Capel. No apologies were necessary, for Angel appreciated solitude, and they each went their own way; for that was understood in an unwritten bond. But when the monsoon broke in the middle of June, the rain descended in steady gray sheets, and roared and battered on the zinc roof of Rockstone, there were no more gay jaunts or excursions down into Chotah-Bilat. The six hillmen shed their wasp-like costumes, and huddled in their brown blankets, or "cumlies," squatted round like a huka, talking scandal and money matters, in their quarters among the pines.

Their employer sat indoors, beside a blazing log fire, inditing sweet little notes on a knee-pad, and knitting ties in becoming shades of purse silk. Angel crouched on the large, square-shaped fender-stool (which was hollow underneath, and a retreat dear to the dogs) and read, and sewed, and talked. For a whole week these two were condemned to a species of solitary confinement. At first, they discoursed of the elements (how Mrs. Waldershare railed against the rains!—the life of India), the forthcoming great fancy ball, and the Chamoli Lake. From lake to Philip was but a short step, and by-and-by Angel found herself listening with eager ears, to stories of her husband's childhood and boyhood. By degrees these anecdotes were merged into tales of Philip as a youth, as a young man—as (here Angel's interest was breathless)—a lover.

Clever Lola drew a sketch of those four supreme

years with the hand of a true artist, permitting the listener's warm imagination to colour and fill in the outlines. Angel contemplated the picture which her own brain completed, with a mixture of anguish, jealousy, and despair. How Philip had loved Lola! though Lola never once said so in plain, cold English; but a broken-off sentence, a look, a quick sigh, imparted more than words. And he had written to *her* daily, whilst she, his wife, hungered for two weeks for a line. But then, oh most exacting Angel, there is no daily post in Garhwal; letters had to come one hundred and fifty miles by a very casual Dâk runner.

Lola gave her companion the impression of recalling these poignant recollections, with the deepest reluctance, and all the time the game—which lasted for eight whole days—afforded her the keenest enjoyment. She was as a cat playing with a mouse, and at the end of the play her victim's heart was as lacerated as any little tortured corpse. Angel acknowledged that she had brought this misery entirely upon herself; her anxiety for information had led her into a very cavern of despair. Philip still loved Lola, for according to that lady's dictum, which she humbly accepted, "It is a law of the universe, for a man to love one woman, and none other"; and when Lola turned her wonderful eyes upon her—those eyes, large, mysterious, sad, and visionary—Angel felt that she could not be otherwise than truthful and good. Oh, she must tear that secret feeling of repulsion out of her heart, and be as sincerely attached to Lola, as Lola was to her. She would love her, and befriend her, loyally and faithfully—for Philip's sake.

A gleam of fine weather, a break in the rains, released the two prisoners, and each hastened to repair to her familiar haunts; Lola to the assembly rooms, the Wigwam, and the polo-ground, Angel to take her walks abroad, as far as possible from the giddy throng. She longed to see Philip again, to contemplate him from a new point of view, to endeavour to discover his real attitude towards Lola. But perhaps he would never tell her the truth, he could be a mystery when he chose. Lola was, and ever would be, first in his heart, and she must make up her mind to accept the second place. Angel was absolutely miserable, and as she lingered on the hill-sides, watching the ghostly white mists creeping up between the mountains, and filling every ravine and valley, till they touched the spot where she stood, and overwhelmed her, she felt as if a great cloud from which there was no escape, had suddenly descended upon her life.

In these days of their mistress's inaction and depression, Sam and John offered much mute sympathy, and protection. They did not forsake her in order to seek their own amusement—no, not even to meet their friends and foes upon the Mall, but formed her constant bodyguard. At night, Sam occupied the most comfortable chair in her room, whilst John sprawled outside the door on a mat. And he never failed to rise and bark, in order to announce the tardy return of the other lady,—for which officious act, Mrs. Waldershare would have gladly had him poisoned.

Early one morning in July, an imposing head overseer, two chuprassis, and a dozen stout hill-

men, were to be found assembled in front of Rockstone. The overseer had brought a letter from "Gascoigne Sahib," and the lady was to start at once, before there was more rain. Angel's heart leaped at the message, it was her order of release. She made joyful preparations for immediate departure—indeed, these preparations had been completed for weeks.

"And pray what is to become of poor me?" inquired Lola in a doleful voice, "where am I to go?"

"You can stay here, till the end of our term of course," responded her hostess.

"And the servants?"

"They can remain too—I am only taking the ayah with me."

"Then I shall ask Mrs. Lacy to keep me company," announced the guest. "I shall be so wretched without you, you dear, sweet, unselfish girl." And this bold lie had a flavour of the truth,—Lola would miss Angel in many ways.

"Very well," assented her hostess, "do just what you please." She was so anxious to depart that she was prepared to promise anything—oh anything, in order to escape. Yes, it had come to that. As long as she was within reach of Lola's extraordinary personal charm, she felt benumbed, a strange, unhappy, powerless mortal. Lola's magnetism and will force were so strong, that Angel shivered inwardly as she realised that if her companion had exerted them to throw obstacles in her path, she would have succumbed, and relinquished this journey to Garhwal. But Lola was content to be left in sole possession of an extremely

comfortable bungalow,—which I regret to say, subsequently became notorious as a gambling den; in fact, the Wigwam sank into insignificance in comparison to Rockstone, for here the play was higher, the seclusion unsurpassed, and the dinners (at Colonel Gascoigne's expense) quite admirable. How little did that officer suppose that the house which he rented, and of which he was the ostensible master, went by the name of "The Den of Thieves."

Angel was presently carried away in her dandy, and as she reached the shoulder of the first hill, drew a long breath—she was conscious of a delightful sense of being released at last, of a sundering of bonds, a recovery of her own individuality. She thoroughly enjoyed the journey, and being borne along higher, and yet higher, into a cooler, clearer atmosphere. First through a part of Kumaon (oh most beautiful Kumaon, with your forests, and lakes, ravines and passes, your exquisite glimpses of the snows, and the plains!) The party gradually left behind them, flat-roofed houses with carved fronts, standing deep in waving yellow crops, and jungles of dahlias and sunflowers, and surrounded by walnut and peach trees. They encountered long strings of melancholy pack ponies with deformed hocks, the result of their bondage from foal time, square-faced women, wearing short heavy skirts and silver ornaments—these latter heirlooms—and now and then a stout little Ghoorka or a shikari. Each night Angel and her ayah halted at a dâk bungalow, where elaborate preparations had been made for the reception of the Engineer's mem sahib. As they advanced further into Garwhary, they met flocks of little

goats, laden with salt and borax, herded by Bhotias—dirty-looking people with Tartar features, and greasy black hair. The country grew stranger and sterner, they passed along the edges of fathomless ravines, between rugged inaccessible mountains, and Angel realised for the first time the inspiring effect of a wild and brooding solitude, where the almost awful silence was only broken by the muttering of her Pahari bearers, as they passed about the Huka, the scream of a kite, or the bleating of a belated sheep.

One march out of Chamoli, Philip met the party. He seemed glad to see Angel, not to speak of Sam and John, who had journeyed thus far in charge of the coolies, and howled passionate protests at being carried through such splendid sporting country. And what did they not descry, as they were borne along? Monkeys, great lungoors, who threw stones, and gibbered at the party—what dogs of flesh and blood could endure such indignities!

“And how is your lake getting on?” inquired Angel; “nearly full?”

“Rising—slowly but surely. I think it will brim over in about three weeks—perhaps less. It depends on the rains. I’m glad you’ve got away all right, before the next burst, which is bound to be heavy.”

“I began to despair of coming at all—and oh, I was so sick of Bilat.”

“How is Lola?” he inquired.

“Very well.”

“She is not sick of Bilat, I gather from your letter?”

"No—she is very gay—and in immense request."

"When does she join Edgar?"

"Possibly not at all. I think she is going to join the little baronet in holy matrimony."

"No?" incredulously. "You are not serious?"

"At least he is anxious to marry her,—and honoured me with his confidence."

"Oh, did he?" ejaculated her listener, and for a whole half-mile Philip never once opened his lips, and Angel's heart was sore, she felt convinced that he was thinking of Lola. No, on the contrary, he was buried in a somewhat abstruse mathematical calculation connected with the rainfall. He seldom thought of Lola—now.

"I hope you will be comfortable, Angel," he said at last, "we have run you up a sort of little cabin, well above the water-line; some of the fellows are in tents, and native huts."

"Why, how many are there?" she asked.

"Only three or four. Evans of the Civil Service; Hichens Jones of the D.W.P.; young Brady of the Engineers, a boy with the richest brogue in India."

"How nice—I love a brogue."

"Then you will certainly take to Brady. He is a bright lad—though not very polished—and here is the Lake coming into view—look."

Angel got out of her jampan, and stood to gaze at it, where it lay locked among the mountains. Chamoli Lake was much larger and far more beautiful than she expected. It looked majestically still and dignified, as if it had been lying in the lap of the mountains from ages remote, instead of being the three months' old child of the rains

and the snows. In colour it was a wonderful limpid green, its face was placid and inscrutable, and yet it embodied the dread of thousands. The slip, which left a mark like a scar, had fallen from the side of a precipitous hill, five thousand feet above the bed of the river, and carried the rocks and débris from the right bank, across the valley, and half-way up the hill. There, its energy expended, the mass slipped down into the bed of the stream, forming a dam, composed of masses of enormous rocks. Close to this barrier, but well above it, was a telegraph station, and half a mile further on, at a point outside the dam, and overlooking the lake, and the valley into which it would escape, was a collection of flat stone-roofed huts, the village of Dhuri. Further still, an encampment, a large rest house, and several recently erected wooden huts. One of these had been reserved for Mrs. Gascoigne, and furnished with a certain amount of rude comfort. As she stood at the entrance of her dwelling, and surveyed the great still lake among its towering mountains, the narrow rocky valley with its twisting gorges, and precipitous walls, she found the scene extraordinarily soothing to her spirit—it was so wild—so strange—and so peaceful.

A considerable amount of life was stirring in the camp, and among the huts. There were goats, and big Bhotia ponies, as well as Bhotias themselves. Government officials, telegraph men, signallers, sub-inspectors, and linesmen, also various eagerly interested villagers. There appeared to be incessant traffic between the village, the telegraph, post, and the encampment. Mrs. Gas-

coigne was elected a member of the little Mess in the Inspection House. They were a cheery party of six in all, who laid their hearts at the feet of this girl resembling a white slender delicate flower (the stalk was of steel). The new recruit's contribution of stores, newspapers, and books proved extremely welcome, and she soon felt perfectly at home, and became the established housekeeper and hostess of the party. Angel took a keen interest in the action of the lake, the gradual rising of the water, the precautions, and daily measurements and calculations. Colonel Gascoigne, on whom lay the responsibility, locked up in that sheet of water, was engaged continually, riding down to other telegraph stations, inspecting cuttings, and protecting the canal works. But his subordinate, Mr. Brady, occasionally took Mrs. Gascoigne about with him. She explored the villages and scrambled up the mountains, rode down the valley on a shaggy Bhotia pony; and in the exquisite mountain air, with its slight hint of the adjacent snowy range, recovered her colour and her spirits. One morning, as she and Mr. Brady and the two dogs were climbing a hill in search of butterflies, he suddenly called out, as he craned over a rock:

“By the pipers that played before Moses! I see a party below on the road making for the camp—a lady—no less, in a dandy—and two men. We shall be a fashionable hill station before we know where we are. Who can they be?”

Angel stood up and leant over to survey the travellers, and controlled her disagreeable surprise as she recognised Lola, Sir Cupid, and the general

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

INTERLOPERS

"SEE what a magnet you are!" cried Sir Capel, striking a comic attitude as Angel descended the path towards him—the other travellers had passed on unconscious of her vicinity.

"Am I? I was not aware of it before," she said. "Sir Capel Tudor, let me introduce Mr. Brady, my husband's assistant."

"—who is worked to death," he supplemented with a grin and a bow.

"You do not appear to be in any immediate danger," rejoined Sir Capel, pointing derisively to the butterfly net, "is it very laborious?"

"Oh, merely an hour off duty. What has brought you out to the back of beyond?"

"An all-consuming curiosity," replied the little traveller, addressing himself particularly to Angel. "I've been hearing no end about the flood that is to be, and will be, the sight of the century, and I am mad keen to see it."

"But why?"

"A great lake bursting from its prison at a stated hour. The telegraph bell rings, and half a province is instantly inundated. That's about it? So here I am."

"So I see," said Angel. "But what has brought Mrs. Waldershare and the general?"

"She came because she required a complete change, and wanted to be with you—she's awfully

fond of you, you know. And the general is here for the diametrically opposite cause to that which has brought me. He swears it's all a mare's nest, and has come to see what will *not* happen, and to crow."

"Rather a long journey to undertake to see nothing," remarked Mr. Brady drily, "and I think his crow will turn into a cackle. I wonder where the dickens you're all going to live. We are a tight fit as it is, and there's a lot of rain coming—you won't care about a tent?"

"I don't care where you stick me, I'm not particular. When do you think the great water-shoot will come off?"

"Within the next two days, according to the Colonel's calculation. He has gone twenty miles down the Alakanda valley to-day, to inspect the preparations; bridges have been dismantled, the canal protected, villages cleared out, cattle driven off—and all is ready."

"Did you bring any letters, or papers, or news?" inquired Angel, who had been puzzling her brains as to how these three newcomers were to be lodged and fed.

"No, I believe the general has a couple of papers. By the way," and his merry face became grave, "there *is* a bit of news—bad news at that—you remember Hailes?"

"Captain Hailes? Why, of course I do."

"Well, he has been awfully down on his luck lately, severe financial crisis, talked of losing his commission, and all that. I thought it was just a touch of liver; I'd no idea he was really so hard up."

"Old Hailes likes to gamble a bit," remarked Mr. Brady.

"Poor chap, he will gamble no more. Last Monday he went out to the Tarani dâk bungalow, saying he was going to shoot shicor, and, by George," and the round merry eyes looked tragic, "he shot himself."

"How frightful," said Angel, pausing aghast, "accidental, of course."

"No," shaking his head, "on purpose. It seems he had been playing high and lost his last shilling, and had not the courage to begin life at the foot of the ladder. He left a note for his mother, and one for Mrs. Waldershare, which she destroyed. They asked for it at the inquest, but she said it was private and most painful. Chotah-Bilat is enormously exercised. Mrs. Waldershare feels the business terribly, she knew him so well; you see, he was a sort of connection—that is partly what brought her here, to get away from the talk—and the—place. She is all right on the march, and has picked up, and been quite cheerful. Indeed, to hear the general squabbling with his coolies over a few annas was enough to make a cat laugh. But mind you don't breathe a word—about Hailes."

"You may be sure I won't" she answered emphatically.

"I'm glad I caught sight of you," continued Sir Capel in a confidential undertone, "and was able to give you this hint about Lola. She's awfully cut up. By Jove! women do say beastly things of one another. They have all got their knives in her just because she's so much better looking than themselves."

By this time the party were descending the hill to the encampment, and had overtaken the other travellers, who appeared to imagine that their visit was not merely welcome, but to be accepted in the light of an immense condescension. Mr. Brady, who was acting host in the absence of his senior officer, was immediately enslaved by the charming widow and her magical eyes. With such eyes, the gift of speech was almost superfluous.

"I wish I knew where to put you?" he said, helplessly, as soon as they had partaken of an excellent lunch. "Mrs. Waldershare, you are most welcome to my tent, and all my worldly goods."

"Oh, I hate a tent," she answered, ungratefully; "it's always so dark, I can never see to do my hair. The general finds that there are two capital quarters side by side about a hundred yards lower down."

"Yes," he added, "I took a look at them just now, not at all bad—temporary wooden huts, apparently new and clean. Mrs. Waldershare will have one, I'll occupy the other. Sir Capel prefers a tent. We don't expect spring beds and electric light on the borders of Thibet."

"If we get the common necessities, we consider ourselves lucky," said Angel; "supplies are so scarce, and there are hardly any tracks passable for ponies. Those two huts were erected by mistake before Philip came here, and are considered much too near the possible flood-mark to be safe. They have been condemned."

The general laughed disagreeably, and said: "My dear lady, the water won't come within a

hundred feet of them, even on the most imbecile computation, and I shall have my things moved down at once, and yours," turning to Mrs. Waldershare.

Mr. Brady opened his mouth to remonstrate, but the general, armed with the decision acquired by years of authority, silenced him by a gesture. As General Bothwell herded a tribe of clamorous coolies in the direction of these two somewhat tempting asylums, Mr. Brady turned to Angel, and said:

"It's no good my talking to the old boy; but when the Colonel comes back, he will soon 'haunk' him out of that. There was a lot of rain last night, and the water is within twelve feet of the top."

"I think you had better share my hut," said Angel to her lady guest; "it will be a squeeze, but those below are considered dangerous—at least Philip says so."

"Don't you think he is fidgety, and bothers too much about things," rejoined Lola, who in her secret heart had a profound contempt for a man she had hoodwinked, and rated his intellect at a far lower value than her own, since her French fables, and her tenacious memory of the dates of the English sovereigns had been, in schooldays, superior to his.

"No, no; I'll go and explore, dear, and do you come with me, and help me to settle in." In a few minutes three figures might have been seen scrambling down to a ledge far below the camp—Mrs. Waldershare, Angel, and her ayah, laden with pil-

lows, rugs, and bags. The "Interlopers," as Mr. Brady termed them, had brought (as is usual all over the Bengal Presidency) their own bedding, also tiffin baskets, spirit lamps, and Indiarubber baths, and by the time that Colonel Gascoigne and his staff rode up to the Government rest-house, the strangers were already footed in the camp, and flowered forth at the dinner-table. Philip, who was tired after a rough ride of forty miles, and a brain-exhausting day, at first received the intelligence of the invasion with exasperating incredulity; but when he heard the general's rasping voice, and Sir Capel's reckless laugh, he realised that Angel, his wife, was not jesting, but in deadly earnest.

Then he asked himself angrily if it was not enough to have all the strain of this unique and imminent catastrophe laid upon his shoulders, and to have to make arrangements for the feeding and shelter of about fifty fellow-workers, but to be saddled now, at the eleventh hour, with three useless sightseers? Indeed, the general was not a mere placid spectator, he was a most malignant critic, who wrote his own impressions to the papers, both local and otherwise. That evening, at dinner, eleven souls were crammed round the little dâk bungalow tables, two joined together, and even in this place, on the confines of civilisation, Angel was compelled to respect the order of "precedence"—the general sat next her—as his right—and Lola was placed at her host's right hand.

"Oh, Philip, we have made ourselves so comfy," she remarked, playfully; "I am afraid we have invaded you, but there are those two unoccupied huts going a-begging."

"Those huts are condemned, and you must turn out of them to-morrow," he said shortly.

"Pray why?" with a little defiant laugh.

"Merely because they are unsafe."

"So *you* think. General Bothwell holds the opposite opinion. What an alarmist you are."

"No, I merely know my business, and I am responsible for your lives."

"Supposing I elect to stay?" she said with an indolent smile.

"I hope you will not, as I should be compelled to have you carried away by force, the same as a fakir, who established himself in his old cave. He has twice returned, and twice been ignominiously removed."

"Perhaps the third time will be the charm?" she said gaily.

"The third time will be his death. The lake will not last more than thirty-six hours."

"Then we are just in the nick of time to see what Sir Capel calls the great water shoot."

"I doubt if you will see much; I believe the dam will go at night."

"Oh, how depressing you are! When we have come all this distance in order to see the sight and, as the guide books say, any other objects of interest! What do you do of an evening?" she inquired.

"We go to bed early, we are mostly dog tired; sometimes we have songs. Angel has a mandoline, Brady has a voice, and occasionally we have a round game of cards."

"Cards!" and her eyes glittered, "oh, do let us have a round game to-night."

Mr. Brady figuratively leapt at the proposal, so did Mr. Jones and Sir Capel; Angel was obliged to join as hostess, and brought out cards and counters, but they only played for half anna—*i. e.*, half-penny—points, and by ten o'clock the lights had been extinguished, the company had dispersed, led by Mrs. Waldershare—*vingt-et-un* at half-penny points! The game was a waste of time, and in no sense worth the candle.

* * * * *

The windows of heaven had opened; there had been torrents of rain during the night, now subsided to a thick penetrating mist; but there was a sort of tension in the atmosphere, as if in preparation or expectation of some awful revelation of nature. The general and Mrs. Waldershare, in spite of the former's furious remonstrances, and her pathetic appeals, had been driven out of their temporary shelter; she, to share Angel's quarters, and he, to grumble in a leaky tent.

"Gascoigne was incompetent, grossly ignorant, and pig-headed." These were a few of General Bothwell's growls. He had arrived on the scene, as special, uninvited correspondent, and hoped to make a good deal of fun and some money out of the affair. Indeed he had already drafted a terrible indictment of the engineer officer in charge. The thought of this deadly document afforded him warm comfort, when he was face to face with Gascoigne's cold iron will, which refused to relax one inch of authority.

General Bothwell scoffed at all precautions, he was a severely trying guest. His jibes, suggestions,

and opinions, were as maddening as the stings of a swarm of hornets to a man whose hands are tied.

About midday, a telegram from the station was sent all down the line "Clear, lake overtopped." Telegrams now came incessantly to the inspection house, only a mile below the station, and everyone was aware that the great event was imminent. At two o'clock in the afternoon the wire said, "Dam cutting back rapidly." At five o'clock, "A heavy rush of water has passed over dam. Lake has fallen twenty feet." Half-an-hour later, "Lake has fallen thirty feet." So far all seemed to be going well. The flood was passing away slowly, but steadily; at this rate, it would keep to the bed of the river, and not rise more than twenty feet, and if the dam was not further breached there would be no great flood! General Bothwell was boisterously jubilant, most disagreeably triumphant, the long prepared for affair had ended in smoke after all; nothing could be seen with the heavy rain and mist, but the lake had commenced falling, and there was no Niagara—no catastrophe.

At seven o'clock the company, clad in mackintoshes, flocked in to dinner; only two were absent, Mr. Brady and Mr. Hichens.

Lola, who had been lying on Angel's bed reading a novel, appeared yawning, with somewhat dishevelled hair and sleepy eyes.

"So the great affair has fizzled out," she remarked, "and the mist is so dense nothing can be seen. How boring!"

The general appeared a little later. He had dropped a rupee in his tent, and could not find it.

He was singularly fond of money—if it had been a copper coin he would have kept the company waiting all the same.

The dinner had commenced—indeed, it was half over—when there was a shout outside, the usual stentorian cry of the telegraph boy, “Tal agiar, tal agiar!” and a long message was handed to Gascoigne. He read it, and with a hasty apology hurried out; but he returned in a moment to say:

“The lake will escape in an hour. I’m going up to the dam now.”

“But I thought it was *we* who were to escape—not the lake,” sneered Lola, reaching for the salt. She paused, saltspoon in hand, and gave a sharp exclamation. “My luck is gone—oh, I’ve lost my luck!” and the face she turned to Angel was as white as a sheet.

“Why, what do you mean? What is it?”

“A little charm I always wear on my bangle. I would not lose it for anything in the whole world. Oh, I shall never be happy until I find it.”

“Perhaps it is in my hut,” suggested Angel. “When did you last see it?”

“This morning, when I was turning out of that other cabin—which now seems to have been so unnecessary. Oh, I would not lose my lucky charm for a thousand pounds.”

“I daresay we shall find it. I’ll help you as soon as you have finished. We will get a big hurricane lantern, and search everywhere. Is it very valuable—and what is it like?”

“It has brought me no end of fortune,” said Lola, rising as she spoke. “I must, and will find it—though it is only a little diamond skull.”

CHAPTER XXXIX

TO DIE WITH YOU

THE search in Angel's hut proved fruitless, although the dhurries were taken up, and the ayah passed her slim nervous hand over every inch of the floor, whilst her mistress held aloft the lantern, and Mrs. Waldershare—otherwise passive—poured forth passionate lamentations.

"I'm certain I lost it in the lower hut," she announced, with a catch in her breath. "Give me the light, and I will go and look for it myself—I can never rest until it is found."

"But the lake," objected Angel. "There may be great risk. Philip says it will come down in an hour."

"Bah! I am not afraid," rejoined Lola, with profound scorn. "Those huts are well above water-mark, and it is only eight o'clock. I shall not be more than a few minutes; but I don't know the path in the dark. Ayah, you come, and I will give you five rupees."

In reply to this appeal and bribe, the ayah shook her head, and said:

"No, no, mem sahib—that not good—plenty water soon—soon coming."

"Then I'll have to go alone—for go I will," she announced excitedly.

"I can show you the way," said Angel, putting on her waterproof, and taking the lantern; "we can be there and back in twenty minutes, if we hurry."

In another instant the ladies had disappeared into the darkness, Angel in advance, carrying the hurricane lantern. There was a heavy, dazzling mist, through which they could barely discern great lights flaming at the posts all the way down the valley (to mark the danger limit). These, in the darkness, twinkled like a street of stars, and how the lake growled within its prison, with the savage snarling of some wild beast straining at its leash.

"Where are you off to?" asked the general, as the couple hurried by the mess verandah, in which he stood endeavouring to light his pipe.

"To the lower hut to search for an ornament," promptly answered Mrs. Waldershare.

"Plucky woman! But I don't think you run any risk, beyond breaking your necks in the dark. I shall come and look after you, as soon as I have started this pipe."

On their way to the hut, the couple encountered Mr. Brady—that is to say, he met Mrs. Waldershare, for Angel was already half-way down the path, her feet winged by some indescribable presentiment.

"Hallo, I say! what are you doing here?" he panted, for he had been running fast.

"Only going to the hut for a moment to look for something I have lost."

"For God's sake, don't," he cried. "Better lose what ever it is, than your life—mind you, I warn you that the dam can only hold another ten minutes."

He had an important message to deliver, and

could not delay, although probably he would have done so had he dreamt that Mrs. Gascoigne was already standing on dangerous ground. Lola smiled to herself as she hurried downwards. What a fright they were all in. Lose her life! There was no fear of that; and she would risk a good deal to find her little diamond skull—her fetish.

In five minutes' time Mrs. Waldershare was on her knees going over the floor of the hut, ayah-fashion, with her bare hands; her hair had come adrift, and fell in one great coil on her shoulders. Her companion held the light a little way above the searcher's head. At last, after considerable delay, Lola lifted her head.

"Here it is," she cried, with an audible sob of relief, raising herself in a kneeling position; "see, the ring is broken. A fortune-teller told me that my star would be in the ascendant as long as I had the skull. Now I have found it, I am happy. What luck! What," she repeated, in another and a sharper key, as the hut rocked violently, and the rest of the sentence was drowned in a long, loud, shattering crash.

There was a peal of thunder, reverberating far among the mountains—the roar of the lake released from bondage, rushing headlong to devastate the country.

"The dam—it is gone!" cried Angel, as the sound died away. "There is not a second to lose; we must fly. Come," and she flung open the door. As she did so the hut reeled over, and a wave of cold water splashed across the threshold. Outside, the drizzle, as illuminated by the lantern, was im-

pregnated with thick red dust, which spread over an area of ten miles. Lola was still on her knees, as if turned to stone, apparently paralysed with horror. The flood was rising in the room, and the hut shivered and trembled like some live thing. "Come, Lola, you must make a dash for your life," urged Angel, placing the lamp in the window, and reaching out to help her to rise. "Every moment it is getting worse."

As Lola staggered to her feet, a wave half filled the hut, and she seemed to lose her reason, and broke into a shrill, wild, unbroken scream—it was hardly like the human voice—minute after minute it continued, and every minute it became wilder and more piercing. Suddenly Gascoigne stood in the doorway. He had returned from the dam, only to learn, to his horror, that his wife and Mrs. Waldershare had gone down to the condemned quarters.

"I can only take one," he said, huskily, and his eyes rested on Angel.

She was farthest away; Lola cowered between her and the door. Lola was crazy with terror, having the fear of death before her eyes, the sound of many waters in her ears. As she stood, in a frenzy, panting like some hunted creature, she was almost unrecognisable, transformed by her emotions. Her livid face, starting eyes, wet, streaming hair, belonged to another woman.

"It means—death?" she questioned, with chattering teeth, and read the tragic answer in the man's set, white face. "Then take—*me—me!*" she shrieked, and she sprang on him like a leopardess, clung to

his neck with locked arms, and the whole weight of a strongly-built, frantic, desperate woman. He was muscular, and in hard condition, but could he ever have released himself from that cruel clutch, the death-grip of mortal fear, the pitiless hold of the drowning? "Oh, Philip, you loved me first," she sobbed; "save me—save me—*me*."

Angel surveyed this terrible scene with a gaze of wide-eyed horror. Of course he must save Lola.

"Yes, Phil," she said, coming nearer, and her voice was clear and decided. "Go; don't waste precious time. Philip, I intend to stay. Save her first; you can," and she faltered for a second, "come back."

Angel held aloft the lantern as she spoke, and her husband, without a word, turned, and splashed with his burthen out into the black night; the water swept him off his feet, for one or two strokes, whilst Lola, who was now demented, and a dead weight, nearly dragged him under.

"There is Jim Hailes. No, I'm not coming—they say I killed him—no, I won't die—why should I die? Who said I won his money? There, take it back—a shocking sight, they said. Don't let the Gascoignes hear—no, no, *I'm* not going to the funeral!"

All this was screamed out at the pitch of her voice into Philip's ear, as he staggered with her up the hill. He toiled onwards with the strength of ten men, for the sake of the figure with the light in her hand, whom he had abandoned for this miserable creature—Angel, his wife. He was resolved to save her, or perish with her. He recalled her face of lofty courage—how her eyes shone in the light, as if she

were inspired by the very spirit of self-sacrifice, whilst she held the lantern and urged him to escape—with Lola. As soon as the party on the hill descried Gascoigne, they rushed to meet him, and he hastily relinquished his burden, and fled down the hill, passing a stricken figure in a tree, whose shouts for help proclaimed that the General was in difficulties.

* * * * *

When her husband had departed with his first love in his arms, Angel stood in the doorway up to her knees in water, holding the lantern to guide them to safety; then, as the flood rose higher and higher, she began to realise the chilly fact, that they had escaped,—and that she was left to face death alone.

She endeavoured to fix her mind on the grim visitor who would claim her young life within the next few minutes, but visions of a gay seaside pier, with the waves lapping underneath and around, accompanied by the strains of the Santiago waltz, into her brain. The memory, under such circumstances, was inexpressibly awful. Was she to pass away with the sound of dance music in her ears—here among the turbulent black waters of a runaway lake in the heart of the Himalayas? Well, at least, she had given herself for Lola—her life for that of another. The thought soothed her, and comforted her heart, and Philip would never forget her—sacrifice; she would live for ever, enshrined in his memory; to attain this was—her recompense.

The hut was above the strong mud-current, otherwise it would have been immediately overwhelmed and carried away by the first rush of the torrent; but,

as it was, it still clung to its foundations, although the water scoured enormous holes in the floor. Angel had climbed up into the window-seat, where she crouched with her lantern, and endeavoured to pray. How her heart plunged at each lurch the building gave; the water was now half-way up the wall, and the end might come at any moment. The hut would soon be swept away, then Philip would see her light floating down on the wild flood, and be sorry when it went out. Oh, he would know what *that* meant!

At this moment the door burst open, and Philip himself half swam, half waded in. Yes, he had come back for her; she was desperately glad, and yet it meant two lives, instead of one! He was exhausted, and almost breathless, as he made his way over to her, and gasped out:

"We have just one chance, Angel—the roof; you trust yourself to me."

She nodded—for she could not speak.

"We will have to go outside, and there is no time to spare." As he spoke he lifted her down, and guided her through water, now shoulder deep. Then he swung himself up by the door, took the lantern from her, and drew her on the roof beside him. When this feat was accomplished he gave a sigh of relief.

"The hut is bound to go," he exclaimed; "if it capsizes don't grab hold of me. I'll manage to keep you afloat. I know you have a stout heart, Angel. We are luckily in a sort of backwater, and will only catch the edge of the flood. We may be carried along and caught in some trees lower down—that's just our one chance."

The hut, which had been rocking and shivering as if about to take some desperate plunge, suddenly staggered, gave a wild lurch, and went more than half under water.

"Oh, this must be the end, now we die," said Angel, clinging to Philip. But no, the stout wooden structure righted itself, spun round, and slowly embarked on the breast of the wild, dark current. What a sight it was, the roaring volume of ungovernable water racing furiously through the valley, and carrying with it, besides whole trees and logs and branches, the frail raft on which these two human beings clung together, with the hurricane lantern between them. The channel was in a condition resembling a storm at sea, and more than once the couple were nearly washed off the roof by the waves that broke over it. The night was as black as a wolf's mouth.

At first they maintained an unbroken silence as they were hurried to what they both believed to be their death. Gascoigne, his arm around Angel, held her closely to him. Then at last he spoke:

"Why did you go down to the hut, Angel?"

"For Lola, to show her the way—she had lost something—I thought there was time."

"But Brady had warned her, and—tell me why you stood back and implored me to take her first?"

"Because—it had to be—one or the other," she stammered. "I knew that you loved her—I only—stood between you. You had escaped—oh, *why* did you come back?" and she gave a little sob.

"Because I love you, Angel. Surely you know that?" and he drew her still closer to him. "I don't

say much—not half enough—I seem cold, but I feel deeply. It is late in the day to tell you that now! It is true that a man has two soul sides—one to face the world,—another to show the woman he loves—you have scarcely seen—your—side—but I swear by the God before whom we may appear in another moment—that I would rather die with you, than live with Lola.”

Angel bent her head upon his shoulder. The long pent-up tide of her misgivings and misery broke loose, and she wept from a mixture of rapture and grief. Alas! death was now doubly bitter; it meant shipwreck in sight of the haven.

The flood travelled with great force and extraordinary velocity; in less than ten minutes the roof was being dizzily whirled through a mountainous gorge, and the branches of huge trees seemed extended like arms, to bar its way and snatch it from its fate. By one hoary old oak the hut became momentarily entangled; the opportunity, the *one* chance, had come. Gascoigne, who had tied the lantern to his arm, and fastened Angel’s mackintosh round her waist and to his belt, now sprang for his life, for both their lives, caught the branch, and swung safely into the tree. But not a moment too soon; the raft was already under weigh, rapidly moving off, to be presently dashed to pieces among the narrow, rocky gorges of the Alakanda valley.

The tree, an old evergreen oak, was not a particularly safe asylum with the hungry dark tide surging below, eager to swallow the refugees, but a rescue party was approaching.

When Sir Capel and Mr. Brady had hurried down

to where the hut had been, there was nothing to be seen but a racing tide of whirling black water covered with blocks of solid foam: the hut was gone. But what was that twinkling on the flood? a light far ahead—not a boat—what boat could live in that mad current?

“They are on the roof,” yelled Mr. Brady, “and they may be caught in the trees two miles down. Come on, come on,” and, setting an example, he started away at a run, followed by Sir Capel and half-a-dozen others. Thanks to their timely assistance, in less than an hour the two who had so narrowly escaped the great flood were brought into camp, wet, benumbed, and exhausted, but profoundly thankful for their deliverance.

CHAPTER XL

THE INTRUDER

THE great Chamoli landslip thus fulfilled its threat; the long-expected catastrophe had come, and gone. The lake had fallen five hundred feet in two hours, and worked the anticipated havoc over a large tract of country; enormous masses of trees and débris came down with the flood, bridges were carried away, and also many miles of roads. Of three native towns, and several villages, not a vestige remained. The passage of so large a volume of water through one hundred and fifty miles of valley, in the darkest hour of the night, unattended by the loss of a single life, was attributed to the services rendered by the temporary telegraph line, and the excellent work accomplished by Colonel Gascoigne, who received the thanks and congratulations of the Viceroy.

The only individual who suffered personally from the effect of the inundation was the once irresistible Lola Waldershare. For some months after the disaster she remained with the Gascoignes, a helpless imbecile, and ultimately returned to England under the charge of a hospital nurse, a mental and physical wreck.

The general and Sir Capel left Garhwal with a revised opinion of themselves, and other people. To the younger man, the trip afforded a magnificent experience. He had been brought into touch with

Nature at her grandest, with human unselfishness, and heroic courage.

General Bothwell's nerves were shattered by his adventure during the flood, and he who had come to crow departed, figuratively, draggle-tailed and crestfallen. His carefully indited letters were never despatched to the press, as his prognostications had been stultified; and he returned to Chotah-Bilat in a condition of collapse, a silent and much wiser man. Doubtless, by-and-by he will recover his poise, and brag and bore and browbeat as mercilessly as ever.

Donald Gordon died suddenly of heat apoplexy in the Red Sea, and the story of the loves of Shireen and Ferhad is lost to the reading world. It is unlikely that his widow will marry—her life is dedicated to others and to good works, and her self-imposed penance has apparently no end. She is god-mother to Angel's infant, and as she placed her in the arms of Padre Eliot at the font pronounced her name to be Elinor.

Sam and John flourish, as they deserve. The sole drawback to their domestic comfort is the baby. Between themselves—though never to other dogs—they stigmatize her as an intruder and a nuisance. To impart the truth, they are unaffectedly jealous.

However, as Sam has more than once been discovered reposing in the child's cot, and John accompanies the perambulator, and condescends to accept sponge-cakes and rusks, she may yet be acknowledged by her four-footed rivals, and all will be well.

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